

Placing Your Enemies in the Hands of God

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon emphasizes the importance of placing our enemies in God's hands and embracing His truth for freedom and blessing.

Duration: 1:01:09

Scripture: Genesis 12:3, Judges 9:1-2, Psalm 37:5, Proverbs 16:7, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:19

Topics: "Enemies"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of listening to God's word in order to receive His blessings. He tells a story using the imagery of different trees representing different choices in life. The preacher emphasizes the need to walk the narrow path of truth and follow God's will. He also emphasizes the importance of having a relationship with God and loving Him, rather than just following legalistic rules. The sermon concludes with a call to place our enemies in the hand of God and release them, seeking mercy and salvation for them.

Transcript

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None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to friends. And please, if you'll turn there with me. The title of my message is called, Placing Your Enemies in the Hand of God.

Placing Your Enemies in the Hand of God. Hallelujah. Jesus, I thank you tonight, that every time we meet, I'm aware that it's your desire to bless your church.

You have only a one-fold desire. To open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there's not room enough to receive. Lord, thank you that we have the knowledge that that's your heart.

And no matter what kind of a word that you bring to us as your people, it is always in your heart to bless your church. Now I ask tonight that this word be received as a blessing. God, that there would be a desire in our hearts to hear it, and to do what you say, no matter what the personal cost.

Father, I thank you, Lord, that you will enable me by the unction of the Holy Spirit to bring this word out in the manner that you want it to be spoken. Lord, it really doesn't matter how I deliver it. It matters how it's heard in the hearts of the people that you gathered together tonight in this house.

I ask you, Father, to open the hearts. God, give us hearing ears and willful hearts. Lord, this is going to be even a painful process for some, but there's great grace, Lord, when we obey you.

Great, great grace and freedom and liberty that you give to those who make the choice to walk in truth. Because you said you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And Father, I pray tonight that before some and most leave this house tonight, that there will be a brand new testimony of freedom.

That people will be able to leave this house tonight and say, I am free, I'm free, thank God, I'm free. And Father, I thank you for that. Lord, you're going to do that in this house tonight.

I have every confidence because you've burdened my heart with this, Father. And God, I thank you for it in Jesus' name. Placing your enemies in the hand of God, Judges chapter 9. Now, before I begin to read anything in Judges chapter 9, I'll just go over a little bit of history.

Now, in the book of Judges, we're in a period of biblical history called the period of the Judges. It's the time after the death of Joshua. You remember Moses led the people out of Egypt after their 400-year captivity.

They came through the wilderness. Then Joshua, the next leader, brought them in to claim their inheritance. Now, throughout the days of Joshua, there was peace in the land.

They subdued some of the land, but unfortunately, not all of it. And the tribes that were left in the land of Israel became a snare to the people. Let that be a warning tonight to you and I, that those things that we will not let the Holy Spirit subdue will eventually become a snare to us.

We will build an altar to them if we follow the pattern of the people of God through biblical history and unthinkably begin to bow down to some things that are against the will of God. Now, some are sitting here tonight and saying, well, how could that ever happen to me? As this message progresses, you may begin to realize that you've already been ensnared by one particular thing I'm going to talk about tonight that is an idol, really, of the people of the land because they do build altars to this and they do bow down to it. And if it's not dealt with in the hearts of God's people, we too will build altars and we will bow down to it.

Unwittingly, even at times, and sometimes even think that we're doing God's service as we're doing it. Now, I pray for great grace. I don't know if I'll preach or teach tonight because I have a weight upon me of the Holy Spirit tonight because of the importance.

It's God wants to bless this church. He wants to bless you. He wants to bless me.

But if we're going to know the blessing, the fullness of what God wants to do for us, there has to be a receiving of truth. There's a condition, if I can place it as such on our part, is to desire and to receive the truth as God speaks it into our hearts. As higher law than all of our own righteousnesses or our self-justification for what we do and all of our own thoughts and feelings and opinions, the truth of God must take precedence.

And if we are the people of God, there is a desiring in our hearts for that truth. Now, this period of Judges lasted about 350 years. It began with the first Judge, which was Othniel, a young man called Othniel, who

married Caleb's daughter.

And from there progressed to the last Judge, who was Samuel. And then the period of Judges ended when Samuel anointed Saul to be the first physical king of Israel. And then, of course, after Saul came King David.

The period of Judges was a time when the people would sin against the Lord repeatedly. They would build altars to Baal and Ashtoreth and other different types of gods of the nations around them. Then they would subsequently become oppressed by the people around them as they had allowed these things that the people worshipped in that society to grip their hearts.

It brought oppression. And folks, to tell you something, when we choose the way of the world over the ways of God, you can be sure it's going to bring oppression into your life. Come to the house of God all you want.

But if in your heart you've embraced the ways of this society over the ways of God, you will begin to live under oppression. And because of that oppression, the people sighed. They cried out to the Lord.

And God, in His graciousness, 13 times raised up what we know to be a Judge. These were people, men and a woman in one case, Deborah, who were raised up sovereignly, supernaturally, touched by the Spirit of God with wisdom. They were hearing the word of the Lord.

They directed the people and God, through these judges, one more time, would raise up an army, would raise up a movement as it were, and lead the people away from these false oppressions that were all around them and lead them once again back into the worship of the one only and true God. Now it's a type really of what Jesus said. They once again embraced the truth and the truth set them free.

I want that established in your heart tonight. Not just as a scripture we memorize and quote from time to time, but I want it to become a living reality in my life and in your life. That we understand when we embrace the truth, the truth sets us free.

There's no other path that it goes on. And no matter how hard it might be to embrace, when we hear it and move in it, it brings us into a place of freedom. Now God, one of the judges that God raised up was a man called Gideon.

A young man who was just plowing at a threshing floor. The land at that time was being mightily oppressed by a people called the Midianites. The angel of the Lord, which is Christ in a sense appearing, a pre-New Testament appearance of Christ, appeared to Gideon and called him a mighty man of valor.

He said, go in this thy strength, a mighty man of valor. Now the strength that he was imparting to him was really just the word that he was speaking to him. And that's our strength, folks.

It's nothing that's really changed. God spoke the word to him and says, go in this thy strength. And Gideon's looking around saying, what me? My father's house is poor.

I'm the least in my father's house. What influence do we have? How are we going to hire an army? How are we going to fight against these Midianites? And he failed to realize that his strength was the commission, the word that was being given to him. That was the source of his strength.

And that's the way it is for the church of Jesus Christ today. When God speaks the word and our hearts embrace it, then the Holy Spirit comes and makes it alive and quickens us to that word that God has spoken into our lives. Then we are sovereignly, by God, brought out of what I call the realm of the flesh and we're brought into the realm of resurrection life, which was bought for us by Jesus Christ.

Now Gideon raised up this mighty army of 300 men, you remember, that defeated, I believe it's 130,000 Midianites, just simply by the power of God. And now we're going into, we'll start in Judges chapter 8, and beginning at verse 30, and I'm just going to be skipping over some verses of Scripture to build a base for this story. Scripture says, And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body, so he had seventy sons, begotten, for he had many wives.

And his concubine that was in Shechem, she also bare him a son whose name was Abimelech. And the Scripture says that Gideon, the son of Joash, died in a good old age and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father in Ophrad the Aбыsarites. And it came to pass as soon as Gideon was dead that the children of Israel turned again and went a-whoring after Balaam and made Baal-bereth their god.

Now Baal-bereth, bereth means covenant, so I mean here they made a covenant with Baal. And if you remember some of the past messages on Man of Conditional Trust, you'll know what that is all about. Trusting in what you can see and taste and touch and feel, really just like the society around them.

And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side, and neither showed they kindness to the house of Jeroboam, which is Gideon, namely Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shown unto Israel. So here's this man who literally lays his life down, begins to follow God, God uses him, becomes a judge of Israel in his lifetime, there's peace in the land, then he dies. And the people turn one more time away from the Lord, and they forget all the goodness that this man has done for them.

It's a tragedy really of humanity, but it happens time and again. Folks, one day, if you are among those who are looking for the praise of man, if that's your whole sense of who you are, I want to warn you, because one day they'll say Hosanna, and about three days later they'll say crucify him. Humanity never changes, and it's such a tragedy when we begin to look for praise of man, and not for the praise of God.

There's only really one voice that counts when we finally one day stand before the throne of Almighty God. Now, chapter 9 starts with the son of the concubine, not one of the ten seventy sons of his wives, but the son of a concubine called Abimelech. He went to the place called Shechem unto his mother's family, or his mother's brethren, and communed with them, and with all the family of the house of his mother's father.

Saying, verse 2, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, which is better for you, or whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerobel, which is Gideon, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you. Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh. And his mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem, in all these words, and their hearts inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, He is our brother.

And they gave him threescore and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Baal-bereth, wherewith Abimelech hired vain and like persons which followed him. And he went into his father's house at Ophrah, and slew his brethren, the sons of Jerobel, that's Gideon, being threescore and ten persons upon one stone. Notwithstanding, yet Jotham, the youngest son of Jerobel, was left, for he hid himself.

So here's this son of the concubine, Abimelech, going and convincing some of the people of the land that it's better that he reign over the people than all the sons of Gideon. And he hires, with the money they give him, treacherous people, and they go to Gideon's house. Now you imagine, how ungrateful can a people get? What a vindictive, vicious act for a man who had really given his life to set the people free when they cried out to the Lord from the Midianites.

And he goes into his father's house and kills all the sons of Gideon, save for one, this young son called Jotham, who hid himself. And all the men of Shechem gathered together, verse 6, and all the house of Milo went out and made Abimelech king by the plane of the pillar that was in Shechem. Now, and when they told it to Jotham, verse 7, he went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim and lifted up his voice and cried and said unto them, You men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you.

Now I want you to stop right there for a moment. Please don't read ahead of me. Here's this young man Jotham.

An incredible injustice has been done to his father's house. An incredible injustice has been done to him. And he knows that he too would be dead had he not really sovereignly, by the hand of God, escaped the plan that they had had for his life.

He was powerless in himself to do anything concerning the injustice that had befallen both him and his household. Powerless. And sometimes, folks, that happens to you and I, doesn't it? People do things to us and we would like to fight back, but we are powerless to do anything about it.

There are some that you're sitting here tonight and there are things that happened to you when you were a child. There were people that you trusted that had leadership over your life or a place of importance and they abused that place of leadership over your life and you were powerless to do anything about it. Just like Jotham was powerless.

And he knew all the people are following this half-brother Abimelech. All he had the power to do was to cry out against the injustice of how he'd been treated. And don't we hear that in society today? We hear individuals and we hear groups at times of people that are powerless to do anything about what was done and all they can do now is cry out against the former injustice and live and relive the things that were done to them.

Yet there is something a little bit different in this cry of Jotham because the scripture seems to indicate that there was a desire in him to have his brethren understand that the path that they had chosen was moving them away from the blessing of God. In verse 7, he stood on the top of a mountain and lifted up his voice. Now he's far enough away that they really can't get their hands on him.

And he cried and he said, Harken unto me, you men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. And the translation of the Living Bible says it probably more simply. He said, if you want God's blessing, listen to me.

If you want God's blessing. Now I don't know, that sounds fairly gracious. I don't know in his position if any of us would have the power to be that gracious.

Would we not rather just stand and curse these men that had taken away our whole household and had done such evil to the memory of our father? But yet he said, if you want God's blessing, he said, listen to me. Listen to what I'm about to say. And I believe this is the foundation of what the Holy Spirit has given

me to speak tonight.

If you want God's blessing, I want you to listen to me with all of your heart tonight. Listen to what I'm about to bring to you from the Word of God. Then he goes on to tell a story, almost like a parable, from verses 8 to 14.

I'm not going to read the whole thing because it would take too long. But he said you had choices. He said you could have had the olive tree rain over you, or the fig tree, or the vine.

And all of these things represent different things. The olive tree, for example, is where the oil of anointing was taken from, from the olives. And the fig tree always represents Israel, God's inheritance, God's heritage, God's protection, God's power among his people when they walk in right relationship.

Of course, Jesus referred to himself as the vine. You could really say, if you want to take typology, you could say you could have had the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit rain over you. You could have walked in God's way, but you chose another path.

And then in verse 14 he says, then all the trees said to the bramble, or the brush, that type of brush that you see on a windy day in a southern town, just sort of blow across the street. You could have had this wonderful, this wonderful creation of God rain over you. You could have known his blessing and his favor.

But yet you went to the lowest, you chose the lowest path to follow. You went to that which is the lowest and you stooped to that and you said, this is going to be our leader. This is what we're going to follow.

When you could have aspired to height and you could have aspired to truth and you could have known the blessing of God, yet you chose the lowest form of carrying on the heritage of those that have been called by God to inherit the promised land. He said, you have betrayed the house and the lives of those who have done you no harm. This is what he was telling them.

Now, in verse 16, now he states then what we know today to be a standing truth of God's word. In verse 16 he says, now therefore, he said, if you have done, if you have done truly and sincerely in that you have made Abimelech the king and if you have dealt well with Jeroboam and his house and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands, for my father fought for you and adventured his life far and delivered you out of the hand of Midian, and you are risen up against my father's house this day and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons upon one stone and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem because he is your brother. Verse 19, he says, if you have dealt truly and sincerely with Jeroboam and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech and let him also rejoice in you.

If you have done his right, rejoice in it. But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and the house of Milo and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and the house of Milo and devour Abimelech. And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beeroth and dwelt there for fear of Abimelech his brother.

Now he basically stood up and said something that we would know in another way is said in the Scriptures to us today. He basically said, this man, what you have sown, you're going to reap or what you have, yeah, what you have sown, you're going to reap. If what you have sown is righteous, you're going to reap righteous fruit.

He said, if you have sown unrighteousness, it's going to devour you. This is the law of the harvest. There's an immutable law of the harvest in nature that's also found in the kingdom of God.

And basically that law is threefold. You will reap what you have sown. Whatever you plant, that's what's going to grow.

Whatever's in your heart, that's what's going to begin to show itself in your life. Whatever you embrace in the interior part of your life, that's going to begin to show in your entire person. If your eye is single, Jesus said, your whole body will be full of light.

If your eye is focused on Christ, if you desire Christ, if you want to live for Christ, if you want to honor Christ, if you want the truth of Christ, there will be a light come into you and the very life of Christ will begin to be lived in and through you. There will be righteous fruit because you are sowing in truth. You will reap a harvest of righteousness in your life.

But the second law of the harvest is that you will reap later than you sow it. Many people have things in their hearts in the church of Jesus Christ and think that, well, I can hide this thing. I can come into the house of the Lord and wave my hands and shout the songs and never have to deal with it.

And they carry on in this manner and I've seen it now. I've been around long enough to see people go a great, great distance in the house of the Lord with hidden things of the heart that they know are wrong according to the word of God. They simply will not deal with it and they go a great distance.

They have zeal, as Paul said, but oftentimes not according to righteousness. They have this supposed passion that speaks and they go a great distance. But the second law of the harvest is you will reap later than you sow it.

And farther down the road, 15, 20 years walking with God, all of a sudden one day their life just seems to break out into this unrighteous fruit because there's been something sown in the heart that's never been dealt with. And the third immutable law of the harvest is simply that you will reap more than you sowed. And oftentimes the last state of a person who will not deal with truth ends up worse than in the beginning.

Didn't Jesus say that? He said the evil spirit goes out of a man and wanders through dry places. And then there's a sense of that scripture that he's saying is gone and is distanced from the man and then comes back and says I will go back and have a look at my house that I came out of and finds it clean and swept and garnished. In other words, there's been no dealing.

There's been nothing come in to occupy the place that the evil once had. There's a season of grace that's given to every life. But I've got to tell you folks if God changes your nature and your heart gives you an opportunity to walk with him there has got to be truth come in to replace what used to be there.

If truth doesn't replace it, what used to be there will come back as the saying goes with a vengeance. It will come back even stronger than it used to be before. And you have a lot of people that after 20 years they get this bitter spirited testimony that tries to tell everybody around them it doesn't work, I tried it, it doesn't work I tried to walk with God, it doesn't work.

Oh, it works but it just didn't work for them because they made a willful choice to reject the truth. When they could have had the vine, when they could have had the olive tree, when they could have had the fig tree they chose the bramble to reign in their lives. Proverbs 14.22 says Do they not err that devise evil?

The writer of Proverbs says isn't it a tragedy that those that aren't they on a path of error? Aren't they on a path of their own undoing? Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 and 8 he said Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. But he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

Paul says don't be fooled, don't be deceived. Don't get into a state of mind of thinking that we can harbor in our hearts things that we know are contrary to the truth of God and somehow still reap a righteous harvest. He says don't be deceived.

It doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way in nature and it will not work that way in the kingdom of God. Proverbs 17.13 says Whoever rewards evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

Now folks these are absolutes. God spoke these things. He moved upon men, they were put by pen in the word of God.

If those that reward evil for good shall not depart from his house. And then Hebrews 10.31 says It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Now in chapter 9, I don't have time to go through it tonight but from verse 39 to 49 we see that the very thing that Jotham spoke came to pass.

He said if what you've done is right, rejoice. And if it's not, let fire come out and let you devour one another. And what they had done was not right in the sight of God.

And subsequently this unbridled fire, this unrighteousness within them rose to the surface. The men of Shechem eventually rose up and challenged the leadership of Abimelech and Abimelech came against them and the scripture says he chased them in the field and destroyed those that came out of the city after him. Then went to the gates of the city, went in and salted the city.

In other words destroyed the land all around, made the land useless for any kind of growing and the people that were left in Shechem went into a tower and they went to the height of the tower and they boarded it up hoping for protection. Abimelech called for the people around him to cut boughs down from trees and they went and they put them at the door of the tower. They lit them on fire and the smoke literally from the fire killed 1,000 people in the tower.

So here are the people of Shechem that initially put forward money and hired these vain persons like Abimelech to kill the sons of Gideon. You see them now hiding in the tower terrified and the smoke of the man that they once thought, this leader that they once thought was going to bring them victory and deliver them. This leader that they once thought was better than God's choice for their lives now is destroying them and that's exactly the way it happens from generation to generation.

If we choose something that we think is better than what God says is supposed to be the leading factor in our lives you can be sure that thing will come after you eventually and no matter how high you go or how much fortification you build around yourself that thing will find you out. Be sure the Bible says your sin will find you out. Hide in the highest tower you want and it will just be the smoke, the stench of the sin will find you out and 1,000 people died.

But you see Abimelech wasn't satisfied with just that. An enragement had come into his life. How dare they challenge my leadership and so Abimelech goes from that, from Shechem he goes to the next town

and he goes to destroy that town.

The people go to do the same thing so Abimelech following the similar pattern says go cut down branches let's burn them out too as well and as he gets close to the wall putting down the first branch of the next pattern of destruction a little old lady from the top of the wall cast down a piece of millstone says it hit him on the head and broke his skull and so he had one of his men run him through with a sword pride right to the end. He said lest it be written about me run him through with a sword and it says thus verse 56 thus God rendered that's chapter 9 verse 56 thus God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did to his father in slaying his 70 brethren and all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerobel. They were rewarded as their deeds deserved and folks I want to tell you something one day multitudes of millions are going to stand before the throne of God and they're going to give an account of the things that they have done in this life which God has entrusted to them.

God has given us a life to live and he's only really given us one path and Jesus said it's a very narrow path it's to walk a path of truth and to bring glory to him to follow his will to follow his way now I'm not talking about legalism I'm talking about relationship I'm talking about loving him he leads, he guides, he lifts, he carries, he holds he gives us all that we need for life and godliness he doesn't forsake anyone who calls out to him he doesn't expect us to even find a path on our own he leads us in ways of righteousness the psalmist David says for his namesake he leads us, he walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death he fights our enemies and prepares a table for us even in the midst of all hell that comes against us he prepares a table for us and our cup

overflows of his goodness this is the god that we serve this is the one and he's entrusted to us a life he gave us life it wasn't your mother and father that gave you life it was god because he gave you life just like when he created Adam and he says he breathed into him the breath of life and Adam became a living soul when the day god breathed into you you became a living soul and you became the property of god the property belonging rightfully owned by the son of almighty god hallelujah and there are many throughout history many in society throughout past generations and even in our generation today who have done like Abimelech and the men of Shechem and they have taken the lowest road the lowest possible road letting self rule and reign in their lives despising the truth of god

despising the ways of god trampling and wounding people along the way to gain what they think is a prize but it's really just an elusive dream they're looking for satisfaction but they're looking in all the wrong places for it and they're in for a time of the truest and purest justice in the universe because my bible says in Revelation chapter 20 let me just read it to you Revelation chapter 20 this is what the scripture says I saw a great white throne and him that sat on it from whose face the earth and heaven fled away for there was found no place for them I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God everyone's going to stand there every president, every king, every despotic leader everyone who ever professed the name of Jesus Christ and was not living in righteousness now folks,

because this is the white throne judgment this is the judgment of the unrighteous dead there was no place for them I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God and the books were opened and another book was opened which is the book of life and the dead were judged under those things which were written in the books according to their works according to what they had done what had they done with the grace that was extended to them what had they done with the promptings of the Holy Spirit to search out a path of truth and the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and hell delivered up the dead which

were in them and they were judged every man according to their works and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire this is the second death and whosoever was not found written

in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire now folks, I want to just make one statement before I go on tonight beloved, God will deal with your enemies God will deal with your enemies you don't have to fight, I don't have to fight God will deal, there is a righteous God there is a righteous end to this world to every man, to every woman, to every child who ever lived I bear responsibility for how I live my life here in this world what I choose to do how much truth that I choose to embrace in my heart and allow the Christ of this universe to be glorified through me Paul says in Romans 12, 19 he says, dearly beloved, dearly beloved I hear the heart of this apostle as he's pleading in his sense with this Roman church he said, avenge not yourselves in other words, don't go and try to

get back vengeance for the wrong things that have been done to you but rather give place unto wrath in other words, Paul is saying, put it away from you for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord now, as Jotham fled the face of his brother we can only hope that in his heart he had released this injustice into the hand of God all the scripture says about him really is that he ran away for fear of his brother he made a pronouncement and then he ran away I suppose that's where many are today in society perhaps even some here tonight there was an injustice done to you and you made a pronouncement way back and just ran away and in some cases you've been running ever since only eternity now will reveal what became of him we can only speculate as to what might have become

of him based on the thoughts of what we would do I suppose in similar circumstances what would you do in Jotham's situation? what would you do after you've been standing on the hill you had the knowledge of what was done to you was wrong what was done to your house was wrong and then you just ran away and behind you is Abimelech and the men of Shechem and they're just living the life of Riley as if they've triumphed it seems like for a season often times it seems like the wicked are triumphing I wonder if he went away to forever rehearse the matter in his heart that's what a lot of people do there are things that happened in the past and they know it's wrong it's an injustice and they run away from it but forever they are rehearsing it in their heart perhaps imagining scenes of vengeance

where the sword in his hand was exacting full payment from a trembling or dying Abimelech you know it's so easy to justify thoughts of vengeance and even feel righteous in one's cause folks I'll tell you something there are many many people who leave a situation behind physically but they never leave it behind spiritually or mentally they harbor it in their heart and they're rehearsing it and playing out scenes of how they would have liked it to end or what they would like it to be like in the future they would like to see the one who hurt them trembling and begging for forgiveness as if there's some king with a scepter making the decision whether or not they're going to give him forgiveness or have some guard cut their head off and relive these things in their heart thinking that because

this is hidden this is alright it's not going to bring any harm to me but that's not necessarily true because the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 23 verse 7 says for as he thinks in his heart so is he as he thinks in his heart didn't Jesus say out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will begin to confess it's the issues of the heart he said that will come forward and defile the man when the Pharisees thought that it was just eating pork and things like this that were going to defile a person he said no these things don't defile you it's what you allow to stay in your heart what you will not let the word of God touch these things will defile you and eventually if they're not dealt with they will begin to overpower your person because as you think in your heart you will in effect become

that kind of a person I wondered if Jotham murdered his brother a thousand times over and over again in his heart I've got to tell you folks as a young Christian especially I had some people rise up against me from time to time and say some vicious things and I had to really fight because in my mind I punched them out a thousand times in my mind I went to their house and kicked the door down you know if you've ever heard my testimony a couple of times that I actually went to a house one time right to the yard right into somebody's face and if God wouldn't send a bird dump on his forehead I might have done some damage to him 1st John 3.15 says if any man hates his brother he's a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him you see that the context is that eternal

life of God will drive out this spirit of murder which is really vengeance uncontrolled that's what the spirit of murder is a murderer just doesn't wake up one day and say I think I'm going to kill somebody now there might be an odd psychotic I suppose in society that does that but the general trend is that people receive an injustice they never deal with it and it rolls and rolls and rolls and rolls in their heart over and over and over again and they start living out scenarios of vengeance and then finally they cannot distinguish between the imagination and reality anymore and the next thing they know the knife is in their hand they are heading to the house and they live out what's been in their heart for 15 years to do they live it out I wonder about Jotham did he rehearse the matter

with his lips before all who would give him a listening ear did he rehearse it that Jotham may be going to another place leave those people behind and then anybody that would listen begin to recount the story and tell every little detail of the story to others who would hear him now if you'll go with me to the book of Isaiah which I think would be really powerful that I had never seen in the scripture before we look at Isaiah chapter 58 it's a familiar chapter for many it's the chapter where God says to Isaiah he said I want you to lift up your voice against something that's in my house he said I have a people that are seeking me daily they appear to delight to know my ways they have an appearance of a nation doing righteousness a nation that did not forsake the ordinance of their God I'm

reading I'm just paraphrasing from verse 2 in Isaiah 58 they ask of me in other words they are approaching me there are people of prayer they're asking for justice and they take delight in approaching to God there are people who in a sense maybe who are even responding to the word of God to a degree in the house of the Lord but yet these people have a question they know in their hearts there's a blessing beyond what their present experience has been they know that there's still a shortcoming there's still some work that God wants to do to enable them to be completely released to his will and his way and they're asking a question in verse 3 it says wherefore have we fasted say they and thou seest not you see God's showing Isaiah their thoughts we're fasting we're approaching you but it's

as if you're not hearing us God why is this? what seems to be the problem? why have we afflicted our soul and it's as if you don't even hear the knowledge of it we're fasting we're praying we're seeking you and this is so important brethren considering that we're going into a fast beginning next week as a church body and that we're going to be meeting and praying every night beginning Tuesday night it's so important to hear this tonight and now he begins to tell them some things and the general context that's understood by this passage of scripture is that God says you've been seeking me but you're hiding at the same time from your own flesh and we often preach it and it's rightly preached so that you're not feeding those that are hungry you're not clothing them naked you're not breaking

the bands of wickedness and doing all of these things and it's not erroneous to preach it that way because it's fully in there in the context of this passage of scripture but there's another thought here that I had never

seen before until the Holy Spirit took me to it and it's in verse 9 he says then shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer he says thou shalt cry and he shall say here I am if thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke the putting forth of the finger and speaking vanity now we generally just sort of pass over that in the context of feeding and clothing and housing and all these other things but I began to research this as the Holy Spirit drew me to this verse and I think the New International Version of the Bible says it the best and I want to just read it to you he

says then you will call and the Lord will answer you will cry for help and he will say here am I if you do away with the yoke of oppression with the pointing finger and malicious talk with the pointing finger you see God was saying the hiding from your flesh is not just not feeding and not clothing as necessary as that thing is but he says you are still pointing your finger at people who have wronged you and you will not release them you put a yoke in a sense on their necks you will not release them and you are maliciously talking about them you will not release the grievances of the past you will not release in your heart the wrong things that others have done to you and God says for this reason I'm not hearing you but if you will do this he said if you will take away this pointing of

the finger at people in the past who have wronged you if you will stop speaking maliciously about them he said then you will cry to me and I'll say here I am I will reveal myself to you this is how important it is to deal with this issue because this thing is not seen often times people feel that it's not necessary to deal with it but folks I want to tell you something bitterness is one of the biggest killers of Christians in the church today it is the only sin in the Bible that is described as having a root in other words it goes deep and it affects the entire being and out of that one sin comes a whole lot of rotten fruit God says if you will yes draw out and if you will stop pointing to the past stop speaking maliciously about the things that were done to you and learn to forgive then

you will find the heart of God you will find me in that one act that's how important it is you will begin to know me how can we know God how can we know God if we're still pointing to the past how can we know God if we're still making lists of grievances how can we know the one sin unto him the wrong things that we have done but came down to the earth and became a man and was whipped and spit upon and bruised and despised and nailed to a tree how can we know him how can we know him if we will not let go the grievances of the past that's the very heart of God what brought him to the earth what made him a man why did he do what he did why did he not just smite the earth the moment Adam sinned and started all over to impute our sins unto us he was not willing to have us separated from him

for all of eternity and God says if you will stop this if you will stop this then you will call and you will understand I'm right there you'll say here I am I've been right there you've not understood that this thing stops you from knowing me you've got to let it go I think of the illustration of the bear a story I heard one time it comes to a campfire and he picks up a hot cauldron where somebody is boiling water and cooking their supper and a bear by his brute instinct holds it to his chest and it begins to burn him because it's red hot and because he has no intelligence he doesn't know what to do and so he just begins to squeeze it harder because that's all a bear knows how to do the more it burns him the harder he squeezes it until finally it kills him it burns right through his fur

and his skin and affects just let it go now folks it's exactly the same and how much more are we to blame who have been given the intelligence we have by God and we know that harboring resentment is like holding something to our heart it's like holding a dagger and driving it into our own heart how foolish to hold these things when the word of God clearly tells us that it cuts us off from his love it cuts us off from

understanding and we've got to deal with these things this is truth that sets people free this is grace berating and chastising his people this is grace this is God saying I want to bless you I want you to know me I want you to understand me but as long as you're pointing the finger and making lists and slanderously speaking you can't know me that's why all of these churches

that are simply a disguise for grievance committees of the past they can't know the heart of God all they can do is list injustices every week and every month they'll never know the heart of God all they can do is bring division until it finally kills them spiritually Jesus said you've got to put the lists away you have to put away the pointing finger and all the malicious talk and then I'll you call out to me he says and then I'll say here I am hallelujah now you know my heart I had every right God Almighty had every right to condemn you and me he has every right tonight to condemn us it's but for his blood it's but for his grace that we stand there's no other reason we stand if he were to point back at your life and mine and make a list of the times that we wounded him in our

conversation and we did wrong things and we even hurt his own children if we were if he were to draw up a list who could stand David the psalmist David knew that he said if you counted if you drew up a list of iniquities which one among us could stand in the presence of God and yet even with that knowledge we're so foolish at times we still want to make our list and still point our fingers and talk maliciously and wonder why lastly I wonder if Jotham ran from the pain the intent on serving God he ran from the pain intent on serving God but yet to build his life on a foundation of corruption this is an incredible thought and some might say her tonight like how can I be serving God on a foundation of corruption well it's quite easy you see the motivation for serving God is to be like Christ

he could have run away from there saying I will never be like my brother and I see a lot of people like that I've met a lot of people like that in the church I will never be like my father I will never be like my mother I'll never be like my uncle I'll never be like that class of people that I came from I will never be like them and then they begin to live their life and that's their motivation that's their motivation you see it's a wrong foundation it allows a man to be full of hate in his heart and yet give the appearance of seeking God you can be full of hate and have this supposed zeal you can answer every altar call in the house of God and people can look at you and say oh what a holy man of God what a holy woman of God how they're seeking the Lord but what's driving you is not to be

like Christ it's to be full of love and and love corruption quite often the person becomes just like the one they resent you say why because resentment has cut them off from God and we will always move in the direction of our focus they are cut off from God to if your motivation is not like to be somebody else that is that is a false judgment that's that's against the Word of God he said judge not that you be not judged that that is a condemnation of another person that Christ died for and God didn't give us the right to do that it's not the heart of God and subsequently I've seen it over and over again young men young women wounded perhaps in their home wounded even under ministry sometime and saying oh I will never be like that

person and they begin to walk this walk with God with this wrong motivation in their heart and they end up just like them because the very issue of unforgiveness in their heart has cut them off from God and when you're cut off from God where do you go how can you grow when you're cut off from God it's like a plant being put in a garage and the doors are closed how does it grow there's no light there's no light and folks that I've seen that tragic end to Christians lives over and over and over and over again throughout my years of being a Christian and especially as a Christian pastor seeing weeping people sit in my office

saying I swore I'd never be like my dad I swore it and now I'm just like him the whole motivation is wrong the whole foundation of their walk with God is wrong they've

been cut off from God the whole time because there's been unforgiveness in the heart Jesus said it himself you don't forgive my Heavenly Father won't forgive you either they're cut off from the life of Christ that God wants to put into them because they've chosen the bramble to rule in their life as opposed to the vine and lastly we can only wonder if Jotham had the courage to release the dead and move on with God to release the dead means that we release those who have wounded us to the justice and to the mercy of God it means in our hearts there's a willingness to see them forgiven and to forgive them ourselves we know that God poured out all of his wrath of vengeance on his own son and full payment of justice for all who would turn to him for forgiveness if we're going to release them

we are many people can't release those that have wounded them because they don't want them to experience the mercy of God you remember the Prophet Jonah wouldn't go he said because God I know you I know you I'm going to preach I'm going to tell them the word and they're going to repent and you're going to forgive them and they're my enemies I don't want them forgiven so I don't want to go and God had to deal with him and bring him around to truthful thinking he said ought we not to have mercy shouldn't we have compassion on these people who don't know their left hand from the right folks I want to tell you something shouldn't you and I have compassion if you have someone in your past that wounded you or hurt you or someone is even doing it today shouldn't that we have compassion on them

who don't know their left hand from the right that means they don't know right from wrong they're just operating from a base of ignorance they've chosen to let the bramble rule in their lives and they're headed for destruction but if we are Christians if we've come to Christ shouldn't our heart be the heart of God shouldn't shouldn't we be ambassadors for Christ shouldn't shouldn't it be in us to release them not only to the justice knowing that if they don't turn yes vengeance is mine God says I will repay but God will also forgive remember this tonight if God poured out all the vengeance that is due for their sin as well as for yours in mind on his own son his son satisfied the complete wrath of God everything was poured out upon him and if you and I want the heart of God we have to be

willing to have God forgive those who have wronged us we've got to release them in our heart and begin to pray for them say God they were in ignorance they didn't know what they were doing as painful as it might have been in my life and for the things that I have had to suffer because of it they were in ignorance but Oh God I am NOT in ignorance today I am now your child I now know your word I now I'm not justified for holding on to this thing anymore I want your heart manifested in me Jesus you had every right to condemn the whole lot of us and send us to hell but you came down and took upon yourself our sins you didn't take into account the wounds that we've given you the times we've grieved you the times we cursed your name the pain we caused you you didn't take it into account you

didn't grieve us you didn't wound us you allowed yourself to be wounded that's why Jesus said you have to move yourself away from this desire for vengeance or you will never know the fullness of who I am you cannot know it until you have released everyone that owes you a debt if we claim to have the heart of God we too desire to see our former enemies forgiven we know the depths of his love we know that we're forgiven not demanding from us any payment for the wounds which we have caused thank God thank God and this love is now being manifested through us and that we desire that all should come to the saving knowledge of Christ I want to leave you at this thought Jotham stood on the hill after all that had transpired and he said to these this half-brother of Bimelech and these men of

Shechem who had chosen the bramble to reign over them they'd chosen a poor and a foolish way but Jotham stood and I hope he and me I can only hope he maintained the integrity that he appeared to have but he said if you want God's blessing listen to me and maybe I guess I have the privilege of standing and being your Jotham tonight if you are among those tonight that have chosen to reject the vine you rejected the fig tree you've rejected the olive tree and you've let the bramble rule in this area of your life and maybe I'm your Jotham tonight standing here in a sense on a hill just slightly above physically the crowd that's here except for those in the balcony obviously and saying if you want God's blessing listen to me and tonight that's simply the cry of my heart God wants to bless you

God wants to reveal himself to you the fullness of Christ God wants to change you and draw you and make you a man or woman of God that has a forgiving heart that is tender that is gracious that that can become as it says in Revelation a pillar in the house of God one who holds up and doesn't tear down one who strengthens and doesn't make weak once your pursuit of Christ to be in truth and pursuit according to righteousness wants to bring you to a place one day where you stand before him and he says well done well done not the deeds we do but the truth we embrace the deeds simply come out of the truth that we embrace you don't have to worry about deeds they'll come once truth is in the heart if you want his blessing listen to me Jotham said and tonight that's simply my challenge I

challenge everyone in this house tonight that has a grievance against anyone or anything there might be some very serious things that have been done to some people here in this house but I want to tell you something there's nothing more serious than what we did to Jesus he never did one wrong thing to us yet we crucified him and rejected him we did it our sin crucified him and so we're unjustified to say my my grievance is such that I can't let it go because God released us and he promises not just to call us to to walk in this truth but he says I'll give you the power I will give you the power to let it go but I want to challenge tonight everyone who has a grievance against a person a particular type of people a particular race of people a particular class of people just as the Holy

Spirit is speaking to your heart tonight I'm going to call you to this altar and give you an opportunity to release them from the debt to put the finger back in your pocket tear down the list of grievances and say Lord you said you said you'd bless me and you said I would call and you would say here I am God I take you at your word lead me now and bless me this message tonight is all about blessing all about blessing and God's desire to do a new thing in many many lives that are in this house tonight after we pray at this altar we're going to have a time of open prayer one of our elders will be there by exit 7 you'll have an opportunity to share with him your prayer request I want to give you an opportunity this evening for those who want to publicly release without names and details but

to publicly release those that owe you a debt to encourage the rest of the body as we all stand if the Holy Spirit is drawing you the balcony you can go to either exit and come down the aisle the main sanctuary to slip out of wherever you are please come forward and we're going to pray together tonight so important before we enter into a time of fasting and prayer next week if you if the tears come just let them come you don't have to be ashamed of weeping tonight if the Holy Spirit is if it's tough for you to let it go the Holy Spirit will enable you tonight to let it go please make come in close make room for the people that are coming hallelujah hallelujah let's pray together Lord Jesus thank you for loving me thank you for forgiving me when I think of all the wrong things that I have

done I know in my heart that you're completely justified to cast me out of your presence forever but yet because you love me you took my sins upon yourself and invited me to come and have fellowship and

eternal life with you Jesus I love you I love you for that you've been so good to me there's a few things you asked me to do just out of gratitude to you and one of them is that you asked me to forgive others just as you had forgiven me to release them from the dead you said I'll look after it you just let it go so tonight I come to this altar just to obey you this thing is hard to do some of the wounds are deep but you said if I would that when I cried out to you you would be right beside me and you give me the strength this very moment I release the dead to those who did me wrong to

those who hurt me and wounded me I release them because Jesus you love them and you died for them Lord I ask you to have mercy on their souls I ask you to help them to understand the wrong things they have done and bring them to the knowledge that they too can have eternal life through Jesus now I thank you right now I would ask you to lift up your hands I want you to lift them up this way look at me right now lift them up this way say Lord I release I release them just an act of faith I release them I let them go just like you'd release a bird just as they said it free this is the conclusion of the message

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