

Belfast Conference 1964-03 Judges 8:22

by Fred Condict

The sermon explores the desire for a king, the fable of the tree, the law of sowing and reaping, and the sovereignty of God, all of which point to the coming of the Antichrist and the great tribulation.

Duration: 50:13

Scripture: Judges 9:23, Galatians 6:7, Revelation 13:5

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the fable of the tree mentioned in Judges' Capital Night. He first examines the historical facts presented in the passage and then explores the foreshadowing of prophetic events. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the true spirit of rule according to God, rather than arbitrary and despotic rule. He highlights three features of this godly rule: a consciousness of God-given capacity, an unholy alliance between religion and evil forces, and the existence of an apostate mass willing to make a covenant with the enemy. The sermon encourages listeners to reflect on these lessons and be prepared to obey the word of the Lord.

Transcript

This is Mr. Condict of Luton. May I ask you to revert to the Book of Judges, please? Let us read first from Chapter Eight. The Book of Judges, Chapter Eight, please.

Verse twenty-two. The Book of Judges, Chapter Eight, verse twenty-two. Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou and thy sons also, for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

And Gideon said unto them, Do not this noble reply, my beloved fellow saints. I will not rule over you. The Lord shall rule over you.

Now to Chapter Nine, with apologies to my beloved brother. Chapter Nine, verse one. And Abimelech, the son of Jerubeo, went to Shechem unto his mother's brethren and communed with them.

As I read these verses, notice the frequent reference to the mother. And with all the family of the house of his mother's father, say, Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem, Whither is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubeo, 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, 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 Berberus. Notice that, the house of idolatry.

That's the reason why Gideon is now named by this man, Jerubee. Can you see the sense of opposition that is implied by the use of these names? The verse continues, Wherewith Abimelech hired vain and light persons, which followed him. And he went unto his father's house at Orthra, and slew his brethren, the sons of Jerubee, being threescore and ten persons upon one stone.

Brutal, methodical murder. But probably, probably sacrificial murder. We would term it that.

The offering of human sacrifice appears oft times in judges. I am not entering into anything controversial, but some of my brethren will know other difficult passages that I am hinting to. Notwithstanding, yet Jotham, the youngest son of Jerubee, was left for he himself.

And all the men of Shechem gathered together in all the houses below, and went and made Abimelech king, notice that word too, please, king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem. And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the tops of Mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice and cried and said unto them, Harken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. This is good language.

Harken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a tide. And then you have the reading our beloved brother has given us.

I shall not repeat that reading. Now please look at verse fifteen. We take up the reading at that point.

And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow. And if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon, the most insignificant Palestinian thornbush is spoken of alongside the most majestic growth, the cedars of Lebanon. Now therefore if ye have done truly and sincerely in that ye have made Bimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubee 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 ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, three score and ten persons upon one stone, and have made of Bimelech the son of his maid servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother.

If ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubee and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in the Bimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. But if not, let fire, let fire come out from the Bimelech and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Milo, let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from the house of Milo, and devour the Bimelech. And Jotham ran away and fled and went to Beer, and dwelt there for fear of Bimelech his brother.

May God bless to us that further reading of his holy word. By the time the reader of the book of Judges arrives at chapter eight, he senses that smouldering discontent in the hearts of the people with the theocracy. The less spiritual in Israel were becoming dissatisfied with the rule of God.

And from the frequent repetition of the word king in this passage, you will see they are desiring to become like the nations around. Oh, how this reflects our hearts, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ. We always wish to have something tangible to continue in our so-called service for God.

How good it is to see in the book of Judges that the better spiritual men refuse such a form of rule. I would that the majority of the people of God were there these days. We are living in days of demonstration.

Somehow or other the people of God must have something exciting to keep them going in the steadfast pathway of obedience. Happy is that man who knows his God and who is prepared to trust him apart from external. One could say very much about that tendency, but I'm sure that the company that is gathered this afternoon are well able to weigh up the influences that I am making.

Because of this condition, you have this wretched - I am not apologizing - this wretched usurper who forces his way by bloodshedding to acquire what obviously he has been desiring for a long time. And because of this brutal disregard for the fables shown upon these men by Gideon, Joseph takes his stand on the mount of blessing and expresses this fable of the tree. I am not refuting what my beloved brother has said when he called it a parable.

We know what a fable is. But I think my brother is correct when he talks about it as a parable. This is a fable that I am quite prepared to say is a parable as well.

We were taught once when not at school that a parable is a nasty story with a heavenly meaning when all that is present. So we are not going to quarrel about that. I want you to look for a little while at the historical facts that are presented to us in this passage.

And particularly in relation to this fable of the tree. And then we can for a moment or two look at this marvellous foreshadowing of events now at hand. There are prophetic events clearly foreshadowed in the circumstances that we have in Judges 9. Then, Brethren, I must revert as ever in the ministry of the Word to those practical issues that are obvious.

Something tremendous is before us in this fable of the tree about the government of the people of God. One of the vexatious subjects in many parts of the British Isles. But we must face up to what Holy Scripture has to say.

We shall be all the better for it and particularly if our hearts are prepared to obey the Word of the Lord. What are the historical facts set before us in this fable of the tree? Obviously the first thing this young, courageous man had in his mind was the blessings of the theocracy. He shares the view of his noble father Gideon.

You will notice he talks about the olive tree and the fig tree and the vine, the three great national emblems of Israel. And what does the olive represent? Just consult Paul again. Go to those wonderful dispensational chapters of the great epistle to the Romans and you will have no doubt about the meaning of the olive.

The spiritual privileges of Israel are in view. Oh yes, the blessed Spirit of God worked in Israel. And of course, what Joseph is telling these people is this.

When you walk with the Lord as a nation separated from the nation, you lose spiritual power. We all know by our knowledge of Israelitish history that that is true. When the people kept aloof from the nation, they knew the power of God.

Has that a message for you, my beloved fellow saints? Or are you getting tired of this excellent truth that is taught in Holy Scripture, which is in perfect harmony with the cross, which is the basis of your salvation?

Do accept, my beloved fellow saints, the full meaning of that cross. Don't selfishly appropriate to yourself salvation and forget the striking, serious issues of that cross in your life. When he talks about the victory, he is obviously pointing out the fruitfulness of Israel when they walked with God.

I need not enlarge upon that. Some of us are equated with that last act that the Lord did on his way to the cross. I am thinking of the last miracle which was one of judgment.

He cut the fig tree all because of his disappointment. That tree was fruitless. And, of course, the vine reminds us of Israel's religious privileges and the joys they had when walking with Jehovah and acknowledging his rules.

I am quite convinced that no man will interpret John chapter 15 aright without keeping in mind this great national figure. I am the vine, the true, the ideal vine. Our Lord is sitting before his disciples' spiritual truth because of the rejection of the nation that is recorded in the earlier part of that wonderful fourth gospel.

So then the first thing that Joseph is reminding his fellow countrymen of are the blessings that the people enjoyed when they walked with Jehovah. I leave that point. I think that's clear.

But you look at the story again and you observe, as I see all the Jewish expositors of Judges have observed, the unalterable law of sowing and reaping. You remember that statement, don't you, that is made by the apostle in Galatians? Whatsoever a man soweth, then shall he also reap. All the rabbis pointed out that this man who so brutally murdered his brethren on one storm was himself killed by a descending storm.

As I observe this great fact in Scripture, I find it has a sobering effect upon my spirit. Whatsoever a man soweth, then shall he also reap. May I give you one or two illustrations of this? From the different circles of operation that are found in Scripture, did the world of men reject that ministry of Christ that extended over that very short period of three and a half years? Did they reject the Lamb of God? They will reap that, for in the page of the Revelation you'll find that for three and a half years men will know the rule of the beast.

You see, if men and women refuse the Lamb, they must have the beast. Or you say, there's no reaping there. My brethren, don't forget that the domination of the wild beast will be worldwide.

I feel a bit naughty when I'm saying this. And particularly because of the exclusive school of interpretation that I find in prophecy. My brethren, do look again at Daniel and look at the use of the expression the whole of and do expound the book I beseech you in light of its general meaning.

And perhaps by so doing we shall be prepared to put the blue pencil through some of the expressions we have used in relation to the prophetic exposition of the world and particularly the revived Roman Empire. Or you say, now you're controversial. Well, we'll have a doubt after I've finished.

What about the nations? I think one of the clear examples found in Scripture is that Egyptian nation. Did that people accept that cruel decree of Pharaoh to cast the male children into the Nile? I suppose they accepted that because that was a kind of worship against human sacrifice to their God. Yes, the God of the Nile.

Ah, but you turn over the pages of your Bible and very soon you find that the queen of the Egyptian army, the very men that were born when the decree was accepted, were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. You remember what the writer of the epistles of the Hebrews says, which the Egyptians are saying to do,

were drowned. Ah, see, that is the government of God working.

Whatsoever a nation sows, that shall it bring. One illustration about individuals, this brings it down to ourselves. We have a clear illustration of this in Jacob, that young man who was quite prepared to link arms with his very talkative mother.

Please accept apology for that. Perhaps I am not one of the gentlemen that Mr. Ray referred to last night who always speaks so nicely about the sisters. Pardon me.

Reverend, you will remember how he deceived his own blind father. You remember what he put at his hands. You are not surprised, are you, when you read in the page of Holy Scripture some chapters afterwards that his own son dangled before him the corpse of his favorite son that was dipped in the blood of a king, the God.

The man reaped what he sowed. Do let this great fact that is taught in Scripture, beloved saints of God, sink into your heart. It will produce God's fearingness.

Remember, it is an impossibility to escape the governmental dealings of God. One more great fact. I have underlined in my Bible, I had no intention of speaking on this this afternoon.

My exercises are in a completely different direction. Look, my brethren, at that lovely word. I have underlined it for myself in verse 5. The middle of the verse reads, Notwithstanding.

Notwithstanding. Yes, Joseph, the youngest son of Jeroboam, was left by head and tail. That is lovely.

What does it mean that the sovereignty of God ever offers to retain for Himself a remnant that expresses His truth? You don't feel discouraged, do you, fellow saints, because of the much talk about departure? I do thank God for men who help us to see it. I think it is necessary for us to face facts, or else we shall not behave properly. Beloved fellow saints, this is one of the purposes of the ministry of the Word of God, that our minds be enlightened and we be helped to walk more accurately before God.

See now, what this verse illustrates is this great fact that God ever retains for Himself an expression of truth. O, let us make up our minds before the Lord, apart from all the excitement of the crowd, to do His will for ourselves, and that will mean spiritual success for such occasions as these when we come together in the Lord's presence. I leave those great historical facts that are embedded upon this portion of Scripture to which our attention has been turned this afternoon.

Now, what about the prophetic foreshadowing? Are we conversant with the prophetic program? Do we understand what is going to happen? The child of God should be equipped with the truth of Scripture, and particularly in these days we are living in momentous times, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, and it is a pity if we are going on and ignoring what is happening. Let me show you what is in this passage of Scripture, and I can safely leave with you after a few hints the outworking of this in detail. What have you in the opening verses of chapter 9? The rise of a usurper.

What is the language of verse 2? Carefully read it with me again, please. Speak, I pray you, in the ears of all the men of Shechem. Will it be better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubel, which hath seized God and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you? Or that one reign over you? That's the language of the modern world.

All the politicians of the world are becoming aware that affairs are unable to be harnessed now by the many conferences and so on. The clever is for one who will handle things efficiently, and that is what is said before us in this portion of Scripture. One reign over you, I mark you, Satan is going to produce that one.

Called in Scripture the man of sin, and I ought to say what else he is called, but that will raise up another point of controversy, but perhaps I better be a little moderate and have one question settled at a time. I'm sure of this, that the quicker we realize there will only be one son in the heavens when the prophetic events transpire, that will help us to interpret the Scriptures clearer and make our way through the maze of prophetic teaching much more easily. If that is too obscure, I can make it clearer by personal conversation.

You will all agree, won't you, that one reign over you is the pointer to the coming over you supper. The next thing, of course, you spot as you read the passage is an unholy alliance. Look at that in verse four.

And they gave him three score and ten pieces of silver out of the house of Beelzebub. This system of religion is now linking with this man. Oh my brethren, that opens up a vast subject, doesn't it? Is it necessary for me to point out to you that there will be an apostate mass that will be prepared to make a covenant with this awful being? Daniel chapter nine is enough to convince us that that is so.

Then, of course, the next thing that appears is this massacre of the sons of Gideon. And I take it that the Spirit of God has designedly placed that in the Scripture so that we understand when the great new supper arises, and when the unholy covenant with death is made, the great tribulation will commence for Israel. Oh yes, I still believe that in the main we have been taught properly the order of dispensational events.

Once the people of God may go through tribulation, as we have been reminded already this afternoon, we must not confuse it and compound it with the great tribulation of which our Lord speaks. Then, of course, you have the preservation of Joseph. And marvelously enough the passage says, For he hid himself.

The whole of the prophecy of Zephaniah is contained in that. What does Zephaniah mean? Hidden of Jehovah. And that is the great message of that lovely prophet.

God will hide his people. Reverend, the prophecies of God can never, never be defeated. God's purpose for Israel is absolutely secure because Israel's Messiah is in his presence.

My brethren in Christ, let me say this. If you deny the literal millennial reign of Christ, you virtually deny the astonishing work of the Messiah. That's what the devil knows, and that's why he would have lots of brethren teach these days that there will be no literal millennium.

It will be absolutely necessary for the Messiah to return in order that the name of Jehovah be vindicated before the nations of the world. God's work of atonement through his Son will be publicly manifested by a literal reign. Is that all right? Now I'm not going to develop with you the other details about Jotham.

Look at them carefully. You will find the intelligence of this young man foreshadows the intelligence of the coming remnant. Oh yes, I think still that the voice of the remnant is heard in the song, and the intelligence of the remnant is revealed therein.

Their crying to God indicates to me that there will be Jotham in character. What follows? The judgment of Abimelech. Now you may accuse me of being too imaginative at this point.

Perhaps you are right. But to me it is significant that this usurper is destroyed by a descending storm. You've read the rest of the chapter, have you? If you haven't, do read it and you'll understand what I mean better.

I do know this. Well, this is the design in the passage of Lot, that this awful, awful usurper will be judged by the storm that is cut out without hands. And that, of course, points to our Lord coming in glory to destroy his cause and set up his kingdom.

If you wish, you can pursue this and look in chapter 10 and notice how you have in the reigns or rules of Tola and Jeir the characteristics of the millennial reign of Christ. I've said enough. Brethren, this passage is surely a pointer to come in the event.

Let's get back to practical facts. We leave the historical meaning. We have set briefly a prophetic foreshadowing.

Now, what is the point in the fable of the tree? Is it not to refute the false rules of Abimelech? Yes, that's the point. So you can confidently approach the passage to learn from it two things. First, the features of true rule and the awful issues of false rule.

Shall we look at these? What is the true spirit of rule? Now, my brethren, we are forgetting rule in wider sphere. We are talking about rule in its proper sense. I know that the word rule in Hebrews 13 is really guides.

I'm not thinking of that arbitrarily despotic business which unfortunately crushes the people of God. No, no, my brethren, I'm thinking of rule according to God. What are its features? There are three things in the passage.

Look at verse 9. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my, my, and the same thing is said about my sweetness, my wine? What is this? Very simply, a consciousness of a God-given, perhaps better, a God-given consciousness of that. Oh, now, my fellow saints, have you discovered what is set forth in Scripture to you about the consciousness in a man's soul that he's called for a certain ministry? Where? The pool of the sea is in his being. Why is it you can't get that man off the land? Well, the smell of the land by the pool.

It's in his blood. Why is it that certain men perform certain ministries? Simply because they have a God-given consciousness that this is the cause of their ministry. Of course, the saints of God will spot that.

And that's what the apostle meant when he says, Know them, that is, recognize the men who are doing the job. That'd be no business of ballot, putting up your hands, and asking the opinion of people, my beloved fellow saints, if we allow these simple facts to take their normal course. Wait a minute, another principle.

Look again at verse nine, and let me emphasize another word, if I may. Should I leave? And, dear me, that is repeated in all other statements. Should I leave? Should I leave? There is such a God-given consciousness of our capacity.

And with it, there is obviously an awareness of responsibility. Should I leave? Certainly not. That's why it has been made.

That's why it has grown, to discharge that particular function. Should I leave? No, no. There are some brethren who talk about resigning from the oversight.

My dear brethren, the language we employ is atrocious. I sometimes wonder, if we are reading our Bible, I hope you don't think I am unkind, but when you talk about the oversight, to be precise, you know, you have no scripture. Taking the oversight, thereof! My brethren, you know that's not a noun word.

That's a verb word. But do see with me that this officiousness, which unfortunately has sprung up, is altogether sanctioned and taught in Holy Scripture. Now, don't run to one extreme, because I am saying this.

Brethren, what I want you to understand is this, that some people talk about resigning from the oversight. Well, something happened to Mr. Watson last night. He said one good thing on another occasion, you know.

One brother said to him, Look, Mr. Watson, if this kind of thing continues in the assembly much longer, I shall have to resign from the oversight. Said Watson to him, Be careful, my brother, the Lord may take you at your word. And he meant, He may take you home to glory, for there's no such thing as resigning from a spiritual ministry.

No, no. This is the language of men who are hardly moving with God in this important matter of administering the affairs of the people of God. Now, perhaps I sound a little bit sour.

I hope you don't think that. I don't intend to be. All I am trying to do is impress you with this important fact that there is not only a God-given consciousness of a faculty, but a solemn recognition of responsibility to this clergy.

What next? The third thing. Do look at the same verses, verse 9 and onwards, and you will see that a man who is functioning in the place that God has appointed for him will administer blessing to the people of God. Yet, if the man is an olive, then he'll bring the blessing of spirituality.

You'll allow me now to make an application quite clearly, will you? And it means that the man will bring fruitfulness. The oil of the gracious Spirit of God will be known in the man's ministry. Now, is that plain enough? Yes, and you'll see that the man is fruitful.

And, believe me, the man will be joyful as well. I don't mean to say he'll be a clown, but I do mean that he'll have a spiritual joy about him that will attract the people of God. Well, remember, talking to a dear brother, I cannot mention him by name, but he was one of the glum sort who always wanted to criticize the people of God.

And, dear me, he was in an assembly where there were delightful saints. I had a bit of a grudge, because he was not harnessing the delightful potentialities of his fellow saints, but instead of that, standing by with a harpoon all the time, I said, now, Tom, please remember that more flies are caught by honey than by vinegar. I don't think he took that too well.

But, you see, my beloved fellow saint, a man who is functioning according to God in his divinely given capacity will bring spiritual blessing as beautifully illustrated by the thing. Now let me turn your attention to the more gleeful side. Perhaps by finishing on this note, the more heavy responsibility will be impressed upon our hearts.

What comes to false rules? Look at verse two, and you will find, by noting that word, shaken. It's not very difficult, when you look at the meaning of this man's name, Abimelech, whose father is king, that there is an ambition of self-promotion in his breast. Beware of the man, my fellow saint, who is endeavouring to advance because of carnal motives.

Oh, that's very heavy, isn't it? It's unpleasant thing for me to repeat. Some of the unhappy experiences have passed, all because men have been motivated by carnal ambitions. And then you will see again, if you look at the verses carefully, that this man was animated by thoughts of such.

He talks about the men of shaken. He is our brother. This business of my father was this, and so I must be.

Wait one moment. You know, don't you, the evils that have arisen in church history all because of this talk about apostolic succession. My fellow saints listening to me this afternoon are taught well enough in scripture to see how ecclesiastical history has revealed the painful issues of apostolic succession.

Yes, some of us have lived to see the painful issues of succession in other circles that are nearer ourselves. Is that plain enough? I think that one of the most disgraceful things that has happened in recent years to Christian testimony, and particularly to assembly testimony, is the awful abuse in exclusive circles of ideals and concoctions found in the New Testament presented to the people of God in the name of truth. Oh brother, this kind of succession is absolutely carnal.

You know what I mean. I won't say any more. All I want you to grasp is this, that a man must not be motivated by centric ambition.

He has no right to move into a spiritual ministry on the grounds of succession. We've oftentimes learned or been taught that godliness does not run in the blood. Then the third thing.

Look, false rule brings at least three things in these verses. One or two minutes and I shall finish. Do look at verse twenty-three and you'll find the first.

Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. And the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. That's the first issue of false rule.

Treacherous. That's a very ugly word. Look now at verse forty-nine.

And all the people likewise cut down every man his bow and followed Abimelech and put them to the hold and set the hold on fire upon them. That's marvelous. The very thing that Joseph used in his curse, as conforms, set the hold on fire.

What is this? Destruction. Treachery. Destruction.

And what next? Look at verse fifty-two. This will be self-explanatory. And Abimelech came unto the tower and fought against it and went hard unto the door of the tower to burn it with fire.

And a certain woman cast a piece of milstone upon Abimelech's head and all to break his scar. Then she called hastily unto the young man, his armor-bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword and slay me, that men say not of me a woman. Slew him.

What next? Disgrace. Treachery. Destruction.

Disgrace. The inevitable issues of false rule. Brethren, help.

O Lord, let us pray that we may live in thy will and know thy rule as expressed through thy servants. Then, instead of treachery, there will be harmony. Instead of destruction, there will be edification.

And instead of shame, there will be glory. And mark you, it doesn't end in time. For the Scripture reveals to me that a man who rules according to God will by and by be crowned with the crown of love.

May God bless you.

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