

Introduction to Judges

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald's sermon on 'Introduction to Judges' explores the cyclical nature of Israel's sin and God's faithfulness amidst their failures.

Duration: 43:10

Scripture: Judges 1:4-29, 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, Ephesians 2:6

Topics: "Introduction"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of Judges and the lessons it teaches. The main lesson highlighted is that God uses weak things to achieve his victories. The preacher refers to 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 to support this idea. The sermon also discusses the state of anarchy in Canaan during the time of the Judges and emphasizes the importance of having any form of government rather than no government at all. The cycles of sin, servitude, supplication, and salvation in the book of Judges are also highlighted, showing how the Israelites repeatedly turned away from God, faced oppression, cried out for deliverance, and were ultimately saved by God. The sermon encourages listeners to appropriate the promises of God and to think in alignment with God's thoughts as revealed in Isaiah 55.

Transcript

Could we turn, please, to Judges, Chapter 1. The Book of Judges, Chapter 1. I'd like to read some verses with you from there. The Book of Judges, before I read, the Book of Judges is a tremendous commentary on the fact the perpetual crookedness of the human heart to go away from the living God. You see it over and over again in this book.

Chapter 1, verse 4. Then Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands, and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. And then turn over to verse 27. However, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shan and its villages, or Teanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Zebulun and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in the land.

Verse 29. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gizzar, so the Canaanites dwelt in Gizzar among them. Verse 30.

Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Titon, or the inhabitants of Nalok, so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and they were put under tribute. Verse 31. Nor did Esher drive out the inhabitants.

Verse 33. Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anaph. And so there you have it.

God had promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites. That took care of it. He promised it.

All they had to do was go in and appropriate it. Go in and take it. What dodos they were.

I mean, victory was sure before they even started. Victory was sure. He said, it's yours.

Now go in, and every place that the soul of your foot treads upon it shall be yours. They went in. But you read the dismal story here.

They departed from the Lord. They not only didn't drive out the Canaanites, they lived with them, and they worshiped their idols, became involved in their immorality. It was a sad, sad picture.

They intermarried with them. And that's how the book of Judges opens. With this terrible scene of Israel failing to appropriate the promises of God.

What dodos we are. The Lord has given us exceedingly great and precious promises. We don't appropriate them.

What does it mean to you today that we're seated with Christ in heavenly places? Well, I'm afraid for many of us, it's just a holy jumble of words, really. But it's a truth. It's a life-transforming truth, and it's something we have to appropriate as well.

The book of Judges is a series of cycles. Sin, the people depart from the living God. Servitude, they become slaves of the Canaanites, their enemies.

And now they're under tribute to the Canaanites. They cry out to God's supplication to deliver them. And God is gracious, and he does deliver them and brings peace and rest and salvation to them.

Did they learn the lesson? No. They go at it again. They depart from the Lord.

They worship the idols that are really an abomination to the Lord. An idol is really the greatest of all insults to God. And his people were worshiping idols.

And once again, they're sold into slavery, cry out to the Lord. He's gracious, isn't he? The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is safe.

And so you have this cyclical story in the book of Judges over and over again. You'd think the Lord would have got tired of it, wouldn't you? And this isn't only ancient history, it's current events. This is going on in the church all the time.

And it's a lesson for every one of us. You know, no one of us who's a believer is really safe from a fall till we get home to heaven. It's a good thing to remember.

Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. I think it's helpful to realize that these judges that God raised up, they were really military leaders. They weren't so much judges as you have at the Olympics, or judges as you have down in the civil court, the criminal court.

They were really military leaders that God raised up in a time of declension to deliver his people. They didn't necessarily rule over all of Canaan, over all of the land of Israel. Perhaps I could illustrate it this way.

Maybe the people of Minnesota depart from the Lord, and God sends Canadian troops down. And then God raises a wrestler up to deliver his people in Minnesota. I'm just using that as an illustration.

And then maybe the people of Texas depart from the Lord, you know, and they start this terrible cycle of sin once again. And God sends the Mexicans in to invade Texas. And the people cry out that the Lord delivers them.

They were military deliverers that God raised up. Canaan isn't a picture of heaven, although a lot of the hymns say that it is. Canaan is a picture of our present position in Christ.

Our present position in Christ. There was war in Canaan. There won't be war in heaven.

But there is war now. We fight against principalities and powers, spiritual wickedness in high places. We don't have physical enemies in the same sense.

Our enemies are pride, unbelief, idolatry, immorality. These are the things, these are the enemies that we have to battle and that would keep us from inheriting our glorious inheritance. Key verse, of course, of Judges is, There was no king in Israel in those days.

And every man did that which was right in his own eyes. That verse is found twice in the book. And in two other places, it says there was no king in Israel.

Four times. What that really means is it was a state of anarchy. You have to really have government to have an ordered society.

And in God's eyes, any government is better than no government. That might surprise you, but it's true just the same. The powers that be are ordained of God.

And any government is better than no government. It was so bad in Canaan and Israel in those days that people didn't dare go along the main highways. They took detours through the countryside to get to their destination.

You read about that in the Song of Deborah. People were living in fear, great desire with safety and security for the population. The first two chapters of Judges tell about the past, kind of a review of what had happened from the times of Joshua till now.

And then the next two chapters and on into the third chapter, you have a preview. And it really isn't any more exciting. The same story repeated over and over again.

Sin, servitude, supplication, salvation. One of the most prominent lessons that you learn, you learn a lot of lessons in the book of Judges. But one of the prominent lessons is that God uses weak things to gain his victories.

And that makes us think of 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Would you like to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 27 through 29. Will help you to understand the book of Judges if you keep these verses in mind. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 27 through 29.

Well, let's go back to verse 26. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise.

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. And the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen and the things which are not to bring to naught the things that are that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him you are in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption that as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord.

I say the book of Judges is a tremendous commentary on that passage of scripture. Let's go over a little of them. You have the story of Ehud.

He was a left-handed Benjamite. The left hand in scripture, don't feel badly if you're a South Park perfect, all right. But in scripture, typically, it speaks of weakness.

If you're a Droit, you're supposed to use the right hand. And Benjamin was, of course, the smallest of the tribes of Israel. So, here you have a left-handed man for one of the smallest tribes of Israel, weakness.

Shamgar, another of the judges, he used an ox goad to slay the enemy. An ox goad? What's a goad? It's just something you prod the animal with to get it moving. It's a very un-military weapon.

I doubt that you'd find any down at the Pentagon or any of the military storage places. But that's what God was using. Why? Could he in himself, could Shamgar in himself defeat the enemy? Of course, he couldn't.

All he had was weakness. But God, God was his strength. And the lesson, of course, is if there's any glory, it's not going to come to man.

It's going to come to the Lord. That no flesh should glory in his presence. Deborah, it's very unusual for God to raise up a woman at a time, but this is a time of great weakness in the nation.

And I'm going to tell you, she was a great lady. You say, well, doesn't that conflict with some of the rest of Scripture where leadership is given to the man? Yeah. What's God going to do if there's no man to do it? You get the man named Barak and he said, well, I'll go if you go with me.

You know, he was the weakest sister of the bunch. And that dear woman, she led the forces into battle and it was a great victory. Deborah, a member of the weaker six.

Then you have Barak, 10,000 foot soldiers and the enemy had 900 iron chariots. Okay. 10,000 foot soldiers, a poor match for Sisera's 900 iron chariots.

Let's convert it to tanks right now. Which side would you like to be fighting on in that battle? Well, God has his ways of working things out. There's a river not too far from there known as the Kishon.

God sent the rain and the Kishon overflowed. Pretty soon the whole battlefield was just a sea of mud. And you know what happened to the iron chariots.

They all bogged down in the mud. What's weaker than mud? God used it and gave his people the victory through that which was weak, poor, despised. A thing of not.

To bring to not things that are. Again, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Jail was a woman again.

She killed Sisera with a tent pin. I can't read the book of Judges without chuckling. Of all things, of all things, you talk to any of our military experts and present this to them and laugh.

They'd laugh. Never mind. God used that tent pin.

And you know, she held the tent pin with her left hand. It's a thread that goes all the way through the book of Judges. She held the tent pin with her left hand.

And God gave her the victory. Gideon. Gideon was from the weakest clan in Manasseh.

And it says he was the least in his father's house. I tell you, it's a beautiful weaving all the way through this book. He went against the Midianites with an army reduced from 32,000 to 300.

Just think of that. Voltaire said that God is on the side of the big battalions. The book of Judges said no.

God's on the side of the weak, the poor. The despised. The things that are not if they're devoted to him.

So, Voltaire, once again, was wrong, wasn't he? In Gideon's story, you have the barley bread. Barley bread was the food of the poor in those days. And yet, they were a picture of the victorious people.

And think of Gideon's weapons. Earthenware pots. A torch in each one.

And a shout. The enemy hated night fighting. Hated night fighting.

And so, at the appointed time in the darkness of night, they broke the earth and the people of God broke the earth in vessels. The light shone out. Those poor men on the opposing side, they thought they were finished.

They started fighting with one another. You can't help but see the hand of God through all of this. A Bimlach was killed by a woman.

Her hand was hurling a piece of millstone. She must have been a pretty strong woman, but never mind. A piece of millstone is really not that much, and she killed him with it.

Even, I believe, some of the names of the, perhaps all the names in Israel are meaningful. Names of people and names of places. And they tell a story in themselves that there's a danger of becoming fanciful when you apply the names.

Tola definitely means worm. Worm. What's as weak as a worm? Samson's mother was a nameless, barren woman at the outset.

And her son killed a thousand Philistines with the, what? Jawbone of a donkey. You say, what's the lesson in that for us? Dear friends, if we could just be nothing. The God's hand.

Some of us say, well, I wasn't in line when the talents and the gifts were given out, you know. There's nothing I can do for the Lord. Other people are so gifted, but I'm just a non-person as far as that's concerned.

Listen, that's just what would qualify you for the Lord. If you would just give yourself to Him. You would just come in the spirit of Romans 12, 1 and 2, present your body a living sacrifice.

Say, Lord, I'm really nothing. But if you can use me, use me. Will He do it? Of course He'll do it.

He's waiting for you to appropriate His promises, to make them all your own. When I read the book of Judges, a desire comes to my mind. I wish I could think more like the Lord thinks.

Would you like to think the way He thinks? Really, it's wonderful. Really wonderful. And so I want to go over some of the things, some of the ways the Lord thinks, and that we might very well imitate Him in.

How does the Lord think? Well, let's think about some of the things. And here again, I'd like to turn to Isaiah chapter 55. Isaiah chapter 55.

This is another commentary in the book of Judges, and we'll show you how that works. Verse 8. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I'll just read the next verse. As for as the rain comes down and the snow from heaven, do not return there, but water the earth and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater. So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth.

It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I said it. But notice verses 8 and 9. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways.

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways and his thoughts higher than ours. How does God think? He does not judge by appearance. He judges righteous judgment.

I sure wish I was more like that. It's so easy to judge by appearance. You see a person in here, she looks good and you think, well, enough to be good.

They look good. You get a few disappointments in life when you adopt that philosophy. It's not the outward appearance.

God doesn't judge by outward appearance. He judges by the inwardness of the heart. We saw that really in the selection of David.

David's brothers were far more presentable than he was, but they weren't God's choice. He doesn't judge by appearance. He's not impressed with physical beauty.

Isn't that interesting? Well, that pretty much throws television out the window, doesn't it? Because if you don't have physical beauty, you don't really have much place on television. He's not impressed with athletic prowess. I often think of that when I hear the people going wild at a game.

So they're hoarse, shouting. Yet my Bible tells me God's not impressed with the legs of a man. I mean, he made them.

But that's not what he goes by. Psalm 147, verse 10b, not impressed with the legs of a man. He's not impressed with high positions in the world.

We are. And I don't say this is critical of Fairhaven or any other church or assembly. I remember during the war, a famous personality from Britain came to one of our assemblies in this country.

It was just a hush over the place. It was somebody more important than he there. That was the Lord.

God's not impressed with greatness as the world sees greatness. When Jacob blessed Pharaoh, in God's estimation, Jacob was the great one there. And it's still true.

That's the way God thinks. He's not impressed by material wealth. We are.

We say, how much is that man worth? What does that mean? It means, how much money does he have? We say, that family is the cream of society. Really? What does that mean? It means, how wealthy are they? What does that mean? Cream of society. It actually means something else.

It means butterfat, but we'll skip that. God doesn't judge by numbers. You see that in the book of Judges, don't you? He doesn't judge by numbers.

3,200? He raises up 300 against them. He's not on the side of the big battalions, as we've already said. And it's not the strong in battle that impresses him.

Not to the strong is a battle, not to the weak. Not to the swift is the race, but to the true and the faithful. Promise is given by grace.

God doesn't choose the wise, the mighty, the noble of this world. And yet, he's the one that has given those tremendous talents and gifts to men. He does choose the weak, the foolish, the base.

Things that are despised, that he might get the glory. Why is it that the Lord wants us to worship him as the great one? Is that conceit? No, it's not conceit. But maybe some of you might be thinking of that.

Why does God say, worship me? Well, I'll tell you why. Because we become like what we worship. That's why.

If you want to be holy, you worship the holy God. For we all with unveiled face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image by the spirit of the Lord from one degree to another. The Lord goes by need and not by greed.

Remember the story of the man who was hiring some people to work in his farm? And some came at, let's say, six o'clock in the morning. And they said, oh, they drew up a labor contract with him. They said, we will work for you for one denarius a day.

Signed, sealed and delivered. All the rest of the day, he took on some men and their attitude was a little different. They said, well, we'll go to work for you and whatever you think is right.

That's good for us. The end of the day, they all got a denarius. You say, well, is that in the Bible? Yes, in the Bible.

You mean these people that began working at six o'clock are the same as those that began working at five o'clock? Yes, because God knew that those who worked at five o'clock, they needed the money for their families. The Lord knows that. And he goes by need and not by greed.

We kind of are indignant at that. Seems unfair to us. Not unfair in God's way of thinking.

You know, I think what a wonderful opportunity is for men who have businesses today to show Christ as a business, to be really concerned for his employees. Show the kindness of God through Christ to them. And God goes by grace, of course, and not by works, doesn't he? God goes by grace and not by works.

For by grace, you say, through faith and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. The world goes by works. Who's going to go to heaven? Well, people who've lived a good life, works.

You say to God, who's going to go to heaven? Sinners saved by grace. They're the only ones that'll ever get to heaven. That's true, too.

I got a call this last week from somebody who's been talking to a Catholic priest. The Catholic priest said, you mean to tell me that God gives commands that people can't... He's talking about the law. That God gives ten commandments and he gives it to a people and he knows they can't keep them.

Kind of a good argument, isn't it? Does God give ten commandments to people knowing they can't keep those ten commandments? Yeah, he does. Well, you say, what's good about that? Darby said something and I'd like you to think about it for a while. People say that God cannot give a rule that they cannot attain to.

I say God never gives a rule that you can attain to. Never. That's something to think about, isn't it? Here's the commandments.

Keep them. Can you keep them? No, you can't keep them. Why did he give them? To show you your sin.

By the law is the knowledge of sin. That's why God gives it. The law is good if a man uses it lawfully and the lawful use of the law is to convict of sin.

God says be holy. Can you be holy the way he is? Of course you can. Imperfection is true of all the commandments of the Lord.

In other words, salvation begins with a crisis but it's a process after that, isn't it? With the commandments of the Lord. And we'll never be perfect until we get home to heaven. Something worth thinking about.

People say God cannot give you a rule that you cannot attain to. I say God never gives you a rule that you can attain to. Never.

And what does that do? Cast you on his grace and makes you realize that in yourself you're nothing. Salvation is of the Lord. God goes by faithfulness, not by success.

Matthew 25. Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. And it's good, isn't it? I'm glad he goes by faithfulness, not by success.

That was true, of course. And all through life it's true of us. Faithfulness, not success.

How do you measure success anyway in the service of the Lord? And not only that, but he goes by desire, not by accomplishment, not by achievement. David wanted to build a temple for the Lord. God said, no, you can't build a temple.

You're a man of blood, a man of war. You can't build a temple for me. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it was in your heart.

I like that. A lot of us have desires for the things of the Lord that we've never been able to accomplish. But it was in our hearts.

It's going to be, he's going to reward that. Is that a current encouragement to you today? I hope it is. I hope it is.

Some have some very limited means and wish they could give more to the work of the Lord. You get the reward for that too. What a wonderful God he is, huh? The way God has for us to resist temptation is by quoting scripture.

Not by gritting your teeth, not by 10 steps or anything like that. By quoting the word of God. You say, does it work? Of course it works.

It worked for the Lord Jesus, didn't it? When Satan came to him in the wilderness, he said, it is written. It is written. It is written.

The devil left him. You having trouble with some temptation in life? Well, you don't have the strength to beat it. Quote scripture and he will leave you.

The ones that are blessed in God's sight are despised by the world. I'm thinking now of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit.

You know, that whole list of things, things that the world despises. In fact, if you take the Beatitudes and just tip them up like this, you have the man of the world. That's the way he thinks of them.

The very opposite of the Beatitudes. Yet, they're the ones that will inherit the kingdom of God. We justify ourselves and maybe we've never committed adultery, never committed murder.

God says, look, the thought is there. The thought is there. And God judges us by the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

And he tells me that purity is not in some outward observance. What defiles a man, not what goes into his mouth, but what comes out of his heart. It's a pretty high standard, isn't it? Pretty high standard for us.

God desires mercy and not sacrifice. The people of the Lord's day were coming with all kinds of offerings and sacrifices to God. And then they're going out living like the devil.

Showing no desire to help those who were in want or in need. God is not a ceremonialist. He's not satisfied with people just doing so many cartwheels for him.

He wants mercy and judgment in our lives. These are some of the ways that God thinks. He desires mercy and not sacrifice.

Tithing is not enough if we neglect justice, mercy, and faith. Really marvelous when you stop to think. Greatness in the kingdom is by taking the place of a servant.

My word, that certainly changes all man's thinking on this subject. Greatness in the kingdom is by taking the place of a little child even. Except you become converted and be of little children, you shall in no wise

enter the kingdom of God.

This is not the way we think of it usually. To be a servant. The men of the world, he issues his orders and people obey them.

But the child of God gets down on his knees and washes the feet of his fellow believers. We equate leadership with lordship, but not in the kingdom of heaven. Men love honorific titles.

They love honorific titles. God says, save those for the deity and not for men. Remember one time the Lord Jesus said, it's not the gold that sanctifies the temple, it's the temple that sanctifies the gold.

What does that mean? Well, people used to think that the temple in Jerusalem was great because of the amount of gold in it. I said, that's not the right way to think of it. It's the spiritual that counts.

The gold should be happy and have a place in the temple. If gold had feelings. But that's the idea.

Sanctified, set apart, set apart. Marvelous. Not the gold that sanctifies, that sets apart the temple, the temple that sets apart the gold.

A man went into a shop in Paris one time and he bought a ring. And just a few francs he paid for it. It was a pawn shop.

And after he had it for a while, he took it to a jeweler and asked him how much it was worth. And the jeweler put on that magnifying glass and he gained some exorbitant amount of money. He couldn't figure out how that was.

He said, look inside. And inscribed inside the ring it said, to Josephine from Napoleon. It wasn't the ring that sanctified the name.

It was the name that sanctified the ring, wasn't it? We always say body, soul and spirit. You listen to men, just in general. They'll say body, soul and spirit.

God never does. Always spirit, soul and body. The spirit that counts, not the body.

In God's kingdom, the way up is down. Hmm. You want to be great in his kingdom, be the servant of all.

He who obeys himself shall be exalted. And God's definition of love is so completely different from ours. His love includes love for your enemies.

For those who hate you. For those who despise you. For those who persecute you.

Those are the ones you're to love. Wonderful, isn't it? You want to think the way God thinks, we should. There's a certain cult, and it says, they say, if you don't... And they have some very bizarre teachings, and they say, if you don't accept these teachings, it's because you don't think the way God is thinking.

Is that how they answer that? So listen, if you want to know how God's thinking, go to the word of God, not to the teachings of a cult. The Bible teaches you to think the way God thinks. It's a lifetime process.

I want to assure you. And just let me close with this. To God, grace is better than justice.

If you get justice, you get what you deserve. If you get grace, you get what you don't deserve. Salvation is by grace.

Maybe there's somebody here today, and you've never seen that before. You want justice. Don't want justice.

You'll be in hell for all eternity. Just reach out your hand by faith and accept the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we pray? Father, we've seen in your word today how you love to take that which is weak, poor, despised, base, a thing of nothing, to glorify yourself.

And perhaps there are some here today, and that's the desire of their heart. They feel that they are nothing in your kingdom, but they want to be used of you. We pray that such might turn over their lives to you today and see what you can do with mud and hail and the jawbone of a donkey.

And we pray that all of us who know you, that we might think more and more the way you think. Look on people the way you look on people. And form our values the way you form values.

We ask it in your worthy and precious name. Amen.

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