

Judges 2: 16-23; Psalm 34:11-22; The Gospel of Judges I. The Needy Context II. The Consistent Grace

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in returning to Judges this morning we are going to find that there is good news here. Judges is a dark book- it is filled with scandalous sin and rebellion. But the LORD does not leave us without hope! Throughout this book we find a consistent point- the LORD raises up a judge in the context of rebellion. In leaving the Canaanite people in the land, the LORD was testing to see if His people would obey. Just as the tree in the Garden of Eden tested Adam and Eve- so the presence of the nations are going to test the obedience of the Israelites. Will you heed my word and obey my commands? Last week we saw that although this book has a solid start- the first generation did what was right in the eyes of the LORD- it takes only a few years for this godly heritage to be lost as Israel chooses to follow the ways of the nations. In forgetting their history, Israel loses its identity and as we see today- she has no future without the direct intervention of God. With each Judge, the LORD is dealing with the military oppression and external slavery- but what is missing is a true King who will deal not only with the externals but the internal heart! What happens in each cycle is that things go from bad to worse- as the wound is only externally healed while the infection festers on. Israel is circling the drain- every rebellion cycle brings them further down into rebellion and sin. It is in this context that we find this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the consistent love of God in Judges.

### **I. The Needy Context**

We start again by looking at the needy context. Building upon what we saw last week in the previous verses, we find that even in the presence of Judges things are not any better. In fact, they are getting worse! As I said before, the judges were military rulers that delivered Israel externally from the oppressive nations and foreign armies. They did not deal with the hearts of the people- so the sinful desires of man remain externally checked but not addressed. And as we will see, the judges themselves often did unwise and even rebellious things themselves! In other words, the point of Judges is not- do what the judges did! So we are reminded that all of Israel- even the judges- were often doing evil. Bad- wickedness- Raah- actions. They were doing right in their own eyes- and acting more like the nations. They went so far as to marry the nations in 3:6- sending their children to

the rebellious world to find a spouse. They were serving false gods at home- as 2:17 says- whoring after other gods. In breaking the first and second commandment, they were committing spiritual adultery. Like the prophet Hosea's wife- they were playing the harlot- breaking the vow of marriage and forsaking their first love. Israel as a nation has been betrothed to the LORD- wed to the God of Abraham. To forsake this God is to break covenant- like breaking a marriage- thus they were adulterous in pursuing other husbands- which were false gods. And even when judges were sent to them, they ignored their leaders- 2:17. They did not listen to their deliver- they rejected the direction and teaching of their savior. Last week we saw that they forgot the Lord and His works. Today we find in v. 20- they turned from the LORD'S Law and transgressed His covenant. The Commandments of the LORD were ignored- the Law was lost upon the people. They broke the vow they had made to be the LORD'S people- and to serve Him alone. And they become more corrupt with every passing year- as v. 19 says. Every cycle of judge ends with the people turning their back- picking up their old sins and even getting worse! More corrupt from their fathers! This is the opposite of moral evolution- human nature tends towards getting worse- more rebellious with every passing generation! Israel is circling the drain- with every passing moment moving closer to the depths below! Like trying to hold back the rising water with sandbags- the judge helps for a time- but the flood waters keep rising until it washes the entire town away! And that is where we end in Judges- with everyone doing what is right in their own eyes. They are stiff necked and hard hearted. Plunging headlong into rebellion- they bring upon themselves the sword! They suffer self-inflicted affliction- self-imposed oppression. Whatever they suffer, they bring it upon themselves. As I said before, the book of Judges is very dark indeed! As it was in the days of Noah- every inclination of the heart is totally evil all the time. If nothing else, the book of Judges shows us what our human nature is like! It reveals our need for a Savior who will do more than throw off an oppressive army- but a Savior who will touch our very hearts and give us new desires! But for the grace of God- there I go as well! We need the Spirit to continually pull us back from the edge of the cliff- to put to death those desire for pleasure, indulgence and worldly prosperity! Judges is dark- but so is human nature! But as dark as Judges is, we are not left without a spark of light!

## **II. The Consistent Grace**

There is a consistent grace that runs through this book. At every stage- in every cycle of rebellion- God is there dealing with His people. Ch. 2:16 is really the center of Judges introduction. It is the key point to understanding this book- the LORD God raised up judges. The LORD- who is the covenantal God of the fathers- raises or brings forth each judge. The arrival of each savior- the appearance of each deliverer – is attributed to the work of this sovereign God! Each judge would save or deliver in his own way- which is in itself a miracle of God’s grace! This phrase- the judge saved Israel- or he saved them- is found 20 times in this book! This the key theme- any salvation found is a gift from the LORD God! Now why would the LORD continue to save and deliver? Why didn’t He give up and just let Israel go? I know as parents our patience can run out- we come to the end of our rope and we lose our temper- right? Well- what we find in God’s character is his steadfast love, His consistent grace, and His miraculous compassion. As v. 18 says, He was consistently moved with pity- at the sound of the groaning of His people His heart breaks! He has compassion on them as He sees their sorry state! He hears their cry- the groan of their distress- and He is moved to compassion as He sees His people crushed in their turmoil! This is a clear connection to Ex. 2 and Ex. 6- when Israel was in Egypt she cried out in distress- and the LORD heard! In their groaning, God sends them a deliverer! As Psalm 34 put is- He turns His ear towards the cry of His people. This applies to us in our distress as well! God hears the groan of His people in their sins- His ears are attentive to our cry for mercy! And in His consistent compassion, Jesus sends a Savior- our Lord Jesus Christ- to deliver us and to break the bonds of slavery! Parents, when you hear your children cry in pain- your initial response is care and compassion. But what if the pain was self inflicted- or if they got hurt doing something you told them not to do? Well- our God hears the cry of His children when they are suffering under a self-inflicted bondage! In this book, it is God who hears, God who sends and God who saves! And God was with the judge v. 18 says- and He saved them from the hand of the enemy. Repeatedly breaking the bondage and sending hope! We can learn a great deal about God’s patience in this book. Israel continues to descend into rebellion, but God holds out His hand and calls His lost son’s home! We see the same point in the book of Jonah- with Jonan and the Ninevites- how patient God is with them! Even in the presence of testing, obstinate and rebellion- how patient our God is with us! One quick application here- is that we should strive to be more patient and longsuffering like our God is! As I Cor. 13 says-

love is patient- bearing all things- and always hopeful. And when we are sinned against, we are told by Jesus that we must be willing to forgive 77\*7 times in Mt. 18. Patient when we are sinned against! So our God is incredibly patient with Israel and with us! How many times haven't we sinned- fallen into temptation- and yet God hears our prayers! We can never sin so long- or fall so far that Jesus Christ cannot save! One of the lies of the devil is this- surely God cannot forgive you- He does not love you! But God's love is greater- His grace greater than all my sins! Judges teaches us that God's love is boundless- beyond all measure. But this is not to say that our sins are light matters- no- God is incredibly angry with sin and rebellion. But His anger in v. 20 also proves His love! People are seldom angry about something they care little over. If my dollar store toy breaks- no big deal. It did not mean much to me anyways. However, the jealous anger of the LORD proves His intense love for His bride! God gives His love to us- and He expects us to be exclusive in our love to Him! He is intolerant of any rival- His pure love is what moves Him to anger. He cares for His people- and He does not want her to serve anything less than the one true God! Anger and love- grace and vengeance are not incompatible! But through it all- over the 400 or so years that this book covers, Our God is faithful! The Love of our God is consistent- and for that reason alone we are saved! His love is steadfast as Psalm 36 says. He keeps His promises- as the Israelites themselves confessed in Dt. 28- blessings will be enjoyed when you walk in His ways. But hardships and cursing are in store for those who rebel. He does not break His word- rather He disciplines the one He loves! He is close to anger and abounding in love- but He will by no means clear the guilty. His compassion is new each morning.

To conclude, these verses of Judges give us a picture into our own human nature. Here we see ourselves- our own failure to love the LORD with all our heart. The LORD was supposed to be their King- as Gideon will say in ch. 8- the LORD will rule over you. But man is prone to do what is right in His own eyes. We need a King who will give us new hearts and new minds- a King who will both save our bodies but also redeem our souls! One who will deal with the external and internal forces of darkness! We need a King who will give us His Spirit- the very King Jesus who will one day return to judge the living and the dead! Jesus Christ reveals the consistent love of God! Praise the LORD that a saving Judge has been sent- to deliver us from the foe and to set us free from our sins! A Savior who will completely deliver us!