Wednesday, September 16, 2026

A Few Good Men…And Women

Judges 2; Judges 18

Last week in *The Story*, we talked about Joshua, Rahab, Jericho, and Israel finally stepping into the Promised Land. For forty years they had wandered through the wilderness, and now they were finally home. God had promised this land to Abraham generations earlier, and now Israel was actually living in it.

And we asked this question: **What kind of person does God use?**

Joshua was scared, but God told him, *"Be strong and courageous."* Rahab certainly didn't have her whole life cleaned up, but she trusted God and joined His story.

God uses imperfect people who are willing to trust Him.

But today we come to the book of Judges, and things start getting messy.

Really messy.

If you've never read Judges, Judges is one of the strangest books in the Bible. There are wars, assassinations, people getting stabbed, people getting tent pegs driven through their heads, Samson tearing things apart, and all kinds of craziness. If you think the Bible is boring, you probably haven't read Judges.

But underneath all of the crazy stories is one big problem:

God's people keep forgetting who they are.

Listen to Judges 2:

"The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel… After that whole generation had been

gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel."

That verse should bother us.

Think about it.

One generation saw God part the Jordan River.

They watched the walls of Jericho fall.

They saw God provide for them.

They knew Joshua.

They knew the stories of Moses.

They knew about Egypt.

They knew about the Red Sea.

And then somehow, just one generation later, the Bible says there was a generation that **didn't know the Lord or what He had done for Israel.**

How does that happen?

They probably didn't wake up one morning and say, "You know what? We're just not going to tell our kids about God anymore."

I think it probably happened much more slowly than that.

Life got busy.

There was land to farm.

Houses to build.

Cities to establish.

Children to raise.

Work to do.

And somewhere along the way, the story stopped being told.

And here's something I want you to understand even as teenagers: **what one generation treats as optional, the next generation will often treat as unnecessary.**

If your parents treat following Jesus like something we do when it's convenient, it becomes really easy for you to think Jesus isn't that important.

But someday, some of you are going to have children of your own.

What will they see when they watch you?

Will they see someone who actually knows God?

Will they hear stories about what God has done in your life?

Will they see you pray when life is good, or only when everything is falling apart?

Because faith isn't passed down simply because your family goes to church.

Somebody has to **tell the story.**

And Israel stopped telling it.

That leads to this cycle that repeats over and over throughout Judges.

Israel follows God.

Then Israel gets comfortable.

Then they begin worshiping other gods.

Everything starts falling apart.

They cry out to God.

God raises up a judge.

The judge delivers them.

Things get better.

Then the judge dies.

And Israel starts the whole thing over again.

Follow God.

Get comfortable.

Walk away.

Life falls apart.

Cry out.

God rescues.

Repeat.

Over and over and over again.

And when we hear the word *judge*, we think about somebody wearing a robe sitting behind a bench in a courtroom.

That's not really what these judges were.

God was the one making the judgment. The judges were the people God raised up to **carry it out and rescue His people.**

That's why Gideon leads an army.

That's why Deborah leads Israel.

That's why Ehud sneaks a sword into a king's room.

And that's why Samson is beating people up.

There are several judges mentioned in the book. Some get chapters. Some get a couple verses. Samson gets more space than any of them.

And Samson belonged to the tribe of **Dan**.

That's where I want us to spend the rest of our time.

Because Dan's story is really interesting.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, every tribe received a portion of land.

Judah received a huge territory.

Ephraim received land.

Manasseh received land.

Benjamin received land.

And Dan received a relatively small section.

And Dan already had a little bit of a reputation.

When Israel traveled through the wilderness, Judah traveled near the front of the procession.

Dan traveled at the back.

That doesn't sound very important, does it?

But think about who usually falls toward the back of a massive group of people traveling through a desert.

The elderly.

The sick.

The injured.

Children.

People who couldn't keep up.

Dan's responsibility was to make sure those people didn't get left behind.

In other words, God gave Dan responsibility for protecting some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

That sounds pretty important to God.

But Dan apparently didn't think it was very impressive.

Judah gets to go first.

Judah gets all this territory.

Everybody notices Judah.

And here's little old Dan at the back.

Then they finally enter the Promised Land, and God gives Dan their territory.

There's only one problem.

There are Philistines living there.

And the Philistines are strong.

Now, let me give you a little geography because this matters.

Israel has several geographic strips running north and south.

Along the Mediterranean coast was the **coastal plain**. That was where a lot of the pagan cities and Philistine cities were.

Further inland were the mountains where many of the Israelites lived.

Between those two areas was a region called the **Shephelah**.

Everybody say, "Shephelah."

The Shephelah was basically the battleground between the coastal plain and the hill country.

This is where God's people constantly came into contact with people who didn't know God.

That's where David fights Goliath.

That's where much of Samson's story takes place.

And ancient Jewish teachers eventually had a saying:

"How is your Shephelah?"

In other words:

How are you doing where your faith meets the world?

How are you doing in the place where following God actually gets difficult?

Because anybody can trust God when nothing is challenging you.

The real question is: **How is your Shephelah?**

How are you doing at school?

How are you doing on your team?

How are you doing when your friends are doing something you know you shouldn't do?

How are you doing online when nobody is watching?

How are you doing when following Jesus actually costs you something?

Dan had a Shephelah.

And they didn't like it.

Their territory stretched toward the Philistine cities on the coastal plain.

God had given them the land.

But Dan looked at the Philistines and basically said:

"That's too hard."

So instead of taking possession of what God gave them, they stayed crowded together in a little area near Zorah and Eshtaol.

For decades.

Think about that.

God had said, "This is your land."

And they were basically saying, "Yeah… we'd rather not."

Then we get to Judges 18.

The Danites send five men out looking for someplace else to live.

Which is strange, because **they already had somewhere to live.**

God had already given them land.

They just didn't like the land God gave them.

Eventually those spies travel north and discover a city called Laish.

Listen to how they describe it.

The people there were living peacefully.

The land was prosperous.

It lacked nothing.

Nobody nearby was going to come help them.

So the spies come back and basically say:

"Guys, you have got to see this place. It's amazing. Everything we need is there. The people are vulnerable. Let's go take it."

And they did.

They abandoned the place God gave them and moved north.

Why?

Because it looked easier.

It looked more comfortable.

It looked safer.

It looked like they could be completely self-sufficient.

And that exposes something happening inside them.

They didn't trust that what God had given them was good.

That problem is actually much older than Dan.

It goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

What did the serpent convince Eve to believe?

“God is holding out on you.”

God said you can eat from every tree except this one?

Then obviously the best thing must be the one He won’t let you have.

And we still believe that lie.

“God, what You gave me isn’t enough.”

“God, why don’t I look like them?”

“Why isn’t my family like theirs?”

“Why don’t I have their talent?”

“Why don’t I have their relationship?”

“Why don’t I have their money?”

“Why don’t I have their life?”

We scroll through social media comparing our portion with everybody else’s portion.

And eventually we begin thinking:

Maybe God gave them something better than He gave me.

That’s Dan.

They looked at their inheritance and said:

“This isn’t enough.”

But here’s the crazy part.

God had positioned Dan exactly where they needed to be.

They were near Judah.

They were near Ephraim.

They were near Manasseh.

They had people around them who could help them.

They weren't alone.

The Philistines looked intimidating, but God had built support around them.

They just couldn't see it.

So they ran north.

And the place that looked safer eventually became dangerous because one of the major travel routes through the ancient world passed right by them.

Armies traveling through the region would repeatedly come through that area.

Dan thought:

"We can take care of ourselves up there."

God was saying:

"I already put you where you needed to be."

That's a word some of us need to hear.

God is not holding out on you.

That doesn't mean everything that happens to you is good.

It doesn't mean you have to like every situation you're in.

It doesn't mean difficult things won't happen.

But it does mean you don't have to spend your life constantly believing that God must love somebody else more because they got something you didn't.

Maybe you're looking at a Philistine right now.

Something feels impossible.

A family situation.

A friendship.

Loneliness.

School.

Anxiety about your future.

Something you've prayed about and it hasn't changed.

And maybe you're thinking:

"If God loved me, He would just make this easier."

Maybe God has already put Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh around you.

Maybe there are people in this room who are supposed to help you.

Maybe God never intended for you to conquer your Philistines alone.

Sometimes God's provision doesn't look like removing the battle.

Sometimes His provision looks like giving you people who will stand beside you in it.

And that brings us back to Judges.

Israel kept turning to God **only when they were desperate.**

Everything would fall apart.

Then they would cry out.

And God would rescue them.

But what if they had learned to walk with God when everything was going well?

That may be one of the biggest challenges for us.

It's pretty easy to pray when somebody you love is sick.

It's easy to pray when your family is falling apart.

It's easy to pray when you're scared.

It's easy to pray when you desperately need God to do something.

But **can you follow God when you're not in crisis?**

Can you pray when life is good?

Can you read Scripture when nothing is falling apart?

Can you worship when you don't need God to fix anything?

Can you simply want God because He is God?

Because if the only time you seek God is when your world falls apart, you may spend your entire life bouncing from crisis to crisis without ever learning how to actually walk with Him.

So there are three questions I want to leave you with tonight.

First:

Who is telling the story?

Israel had a generation grow up that didn't know what God had done.

Some of you have parents and grandparents who have told you incredible stories of God's faithfulness.

Listen to them.

And start building your own stories.

You are not too young to have a history with God.

You are living that history right now.

Someday somebody may need to hear what God did in your life when you were fourteen, sixteen, or eighteen years old.

Second:

Can you follow God when you're not desperate?

Don't wait until everything falls apart to talk to Him.

Learn His voice now.

Walk with Him now.

Know His Word now.

Build that relationship now.

And third:

Do you believe God is holding out on you?

Because Dan did.

They looked at their portion and decided God had given them a bad deal.

So they went looking for something easier.

And sometimes the hardest act of faith is simply saying:

"God, I don't understand my portion right now, but I trust You."

Maybe you don't love the situation.

Maybe you wish things were different.

Maybe the Philistines look huge.

But God has not forgotten you.

And maybe the question tonight is the old question:

How is your Shephelah?

How are you doing in that place where following Jesus gets difficult?

Because anybody can say they trust God from the safety of the hill country.

Faith gets tested in the Shephelah.

And God is still looking for a few good men…

…and women…

who will trust Him there.

Not perfect men and women.

Not people who have everything figured out.

Joshua was afraid.

Rahab had a past.

The judges were deeply imperfect people.

But God has always worked through ordinary people who are willing to trust His story.

So wherever your Shephelah is this week—

trust Him there.