

"What Is This You Have Done?"

Back in 1992 at the Olympics in Barcelona, Spain at the track and field stadium, the gun sounded for the 400-meter semifinals. About 100 meters into the race, Britain's Derek Raymond crumpled to the track in pain with a torn hamstring. Medical attendants rushed out with a stretcher, but he waved them all aside, struggled to his feet, and began a desperate effort to finish the race. Four years earlier he had also qualified for the Olympics in Seoul, Korea. Ninety seconds before his heat, he had to pull out because of an Achilles tendon injury. Following that injury, he had five surgeries. Yet somehow he had qualified for the Olympics, and this time he'd just suffered a career-ending injury. But he said to himself, *"I'm not quitting. I'm going to finish this race."* He struggled to his feet and started stumbling down the lane. From up in the stands, a big guy came running onto the field, pushing past security and up to Derek Raymond's side and embraced him. He was Jim Raymond, his father. Now, arm around his son's waist, Derek's arm around his dad's shoulders and neck, they continued down the track. Mom and sister were watching back home on television. His sister, who was pregnant, went into false labor. Mom was weeping. There, at the stadium, the crowd stood and cheered for his courage and perseverance. Derek and his dad worked their way around the track until, finally, arm in arm, they made it to the finish. That's grit! Just not giving up. ¹

When we began this series *"the Struggle for Courage"* from Joshua and Judges, I referenced the research of Psychologist Angela Duckworth in her book titled *"Grit."* Her studies concluded that the best predictor of success with any goal in life was "grit" defined as passion plus perseverance. Passion with perseverance outperformed every other talent or quality over and over again. ² It's clear in the Bible that a robust life of faith, knowing and loving God and following him requires a kind of godly grit. The Lord told Joshua to *be strong and very couragous*. We all need that because the battles the ancient Israelites fought are intended to teach us lessons about the spiritual battles we *all* face in life and we are all in a battle of some sort. You could say the book of Joshua shows us what can happen when God's people live with the strength of courageous faith. The book of Judges which follows Joshua shows us what happens when we do not. One author says the book of Judges is the story of despicable people doing deplorable things. That may be true, but there is a point to it.

The point is: ***In the battle between good and evil, we must never stop fighting until the final victory is achieved because, with God, good enough is not good enough.*** When we say “good enough isn’t good enough” the issue isn’t perfectionism. It is perseverance.

The story begins in **verse 1** with The Angel of the LORD. This is the Lord appearing in an angelic form. He says, “*I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?*” It’s always interesting when God asks a question. He already knows the answer. So the question is a call for us to think about the implications of what’s happened. There are at least three implications here, and there are three corresponding applications for us.

The first implication is that they have settled for past victories and partial obedience instead of pressing on in the fight. I think there are times when God could ask of all or any one of us...

I. WHAT IS THIS YOU HAVE DONE? HAVE YOU SETTLED FOR PAST VICTORIES INSTEAD OF PRESSING ON IN THE FIGHT?

In **verse 2**, the Lord told them they were not to make a covenant with the Canaanites. After four-hundred years during which God patiently put up with them, Canaanite culture had come under a sentence of divine judgment. The Canaanites were brutal slave-masters, depraved sexual predators and homicidal idolaters who sacrificed their children to demonic gods. God commanded his people to be his agents of judgment to cleanse that land of its cancerous culture. They were to expel the people, and destroy the idols and altars. They could be strong and courageous because God would be faithful to his promises. But what happened? They quit pressing on to possess the whole land.

God wanted his people to drive out all the darkness and make the Promised Land a place in which his kingdom would be established as a place of light for the whole world. The Israelites just wanted to gain control of enough land to start building their own kingdoms. They didn’t care much what the Canaanites in the next valley were doing as long as they could start growing their flocks and planting their vineyards. They were more practical-pragmatic than spiritual. Instead of expelling the Canaanites, they made covenants with them. They put some of them to forced labor. They lived alongside others. There was no

instant disaster. In fact, they were, for the most part, in control. It was working.

Or was it? A leading Scholar on the book of Judges says the theme of this book is the Canaanization of Israel ³. What God wanted was the sanctification of Canaan. What happened was the Canaanization of Israel. Jesus told us we're to be the salt and light of the world. But if we don't press on in that, the tide of influence shifts and instead of our influence growing in the world the darkness of the world begins to influence us and undermine our distinctiveness.

Scripture gives us a key to apply there story to ours. In **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** it says, *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.* Our battle is not a physical battle for a place on earth. But it is a real battle - a spiritual battle for the holiness of our souls and the spread of the gospel. Until the final victory is won, we need to press on. We can't stop.

Illustration: When I first became a Christian, I was often committing petty crimes. I was deeply entangled in substance abuse. I had a filthy mouth. I was through and through selfish, immature, and quick to anger. When I understood the reality and love of God - that I could have forgiveness and a relationship with God that gave me not only his presence but also a sense of purpose - I turned to Christ and put my faith in him. I experienced some dramatic changes. It took tough choices, lost friends and hard work, but within a year and a half, I was no longer doing drugs, committing crimes, or dropping curse words. People saw the profound difference. The Federal Government gave me money for college as a rehabilitated socially disruptive behavior pattern! But underneath it all, I was still selfish, immature, and quick to anger. What if I had been satisfied to settle with those dramatic but incomplete early victories? As hard as those changes were, they were easier than my life long, still unfinished, ongoing struggle to know God more deeply and follow Jesus more closely. To use the imagery of Judges, we all have unconquered areas of ungodly culture in our hearts. My temptation and yours is this: after we have won a few major victories. We no longer feel the urgency to press on in the more difficult battles that remain. We want to get on with our lives. So the lustful young man, the materialistic woman, the grumpy old timer, the easily offender older woman says, "So what if there are little strongholds of spiritual corruption hidden in some of the more remote

parts of my hearts? Can't I settle for good enough so that I can focus on what I want?

Listen to Scripture. **2 Corinthians 7:1**, *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* Think of your life as a sort of Promised Land harboring areas infested with a culture opposed to God. Keep taking ground, keep fighting, and pressing on.

The danger you face is not that you will prove to be a weak or imperfect warrior that's understood. The danger is that you will be tempted to settle for good enough in the spiritual dimension when you should be pressing on. The famous Theologian J.I. Packer defines repentance this way, *"Repentance is turning from as much as you know of your sin, to give as much as you know of yourself, to as much as you know of your God."* The point is as life goes on, you learn more, and you keep growing. You will fall, but you can't quit. Keep confessing your sins, receive forgiveness, press on. Stumble, but don't stop. Your father is as your side. Lean on him, and keep on learning, growing, changing, fighting.

The first implication of the question is that settled for past victories and quit pressing on. The second implication surfaces in **verse 3**, *So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.*" The second implication is that they did not realize the danger of not fighting.

There are times when God could ask of all of us or any one of us...

II. WHAT IS THIS YOU HAVE DONE? DON'T YOU REALIZE THE DANGER YOU FACE WHEN YOU QUIT FIGHTING?

When some people think about God's judgment, they picture God hurling lightning bolts at people, directly messing with our lives. Often what you find is God just allowing us to suffer the consequences of our own foolish choices. In **verse 3**. God says if you quit fighting, you are going to face some dangerous consequences.

A. The danger if you don't keep fighting is not just that those things don't get better but that things go from bad to worse.

Verse 3 says, *"They shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you."* This often happens in our lives, and this is an important theme played out through the book of Judges. The book of

Judges tells the story of twelve successive characters. These are the judges to whom the title of the book refers.

The word “judge” is misleading. These are not courtroom judges. They are more like tribal chieftains. They emerge as part of a cycle repeated six times.

1. God’s people don’t follow-through on their obedience to God. They rebel against him do what is right in their own eyes.
2. God removes his protection and allows them to face the consequences of their foolish choices.
3. They end up suffering oppression from their enemies.
4. They cry out for God to help them.
5. God raises up a leader (the judge) who bring deliverance.
6. The people experience some relief and peace.
7. Then the judge dies.

After the judge dies, people disobey God or obey partially again, and the cycle starts over again. Each time it spirals down into progressive degeneration. The book of Judges ends with an extended conclusion. A key phrase repeated at the end of the book of Judges is *“In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*⁴What began as partial obedience degenerates into total chaos. That’s the pattern in history, in our country, in the culture, and in the church. It can be the pattern in a family and even in our own souls. When we settle for “good enough” and stop persevering and growing things never stay “good enough. They just go from bad to worse.

B. The danger when you don’t root out idolatry is that the false gods enslave us.

Verse 3 says, *Their gods shall be a snare to you.* The idols of the ancient world were fertility gods. That sounds ancient and exotic, but it just means they worshipped potency. They wanted their crops to be fertile, their livestock to be fertile their families to be fertile. So sex and success, pleasure, and prosperity was what they worshipped. We no longer worship Baal and Ashtaroth, but we still worship pleasure and prosperity in a multitude of ways.

Illustration: In her book *Out of the Salt Shaker,*” Rebecca Pippert writes: *“Whatever controls us really is our god.... The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks*

*acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life.”*⁵

Application: What truly rules your life? To what do you offer up your adoration and sacrifice? The apostle John writing in **1 John 5:21**, many years after the days of the judges says, *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* If money, security, fame, the approval of people or pride is your idol, you will sacrifice your emotional health, your gifts, and talents, your time and treasures to serve that false god. In the end, it will ensnare you and make you miserable. Your miseries and emotions can often help you identify what false god's you have started to worship. We have to keep tearing down the idols in our hearts by turning from them and turning back to the only God who loves us, sacrifices for us, and fulfills us.

The first implication of the question: What is this you have done is that you have settled for partial victories and have stopped pressing on in the fight. The second implication is that you have not realized the danger you face when you quit fighting. The third implication is simply that you have forgotten your God!

There are times when God could ask all of us or any one of us...

III. WHAT IS THIS YOU HAVE DONE? HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN YOUR GOD?

Verse 1 says, *Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers.* He reminds them that he redeemed them, saved them, led them. The Angel came from Gilgal! That was where God told Israel to renew their commitment with him by the sign of circumcision. It had been an important new beginning, but they had forgotten what it meant. It got worse after Joshua's generation died off. **Verse 10** says, *And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.* To know the Lord is not just to know about him. It is to have an actual relationship with him. The only true hero in Judges is God. Here are three lessons Judges teaches us about God so we can know him.

1. God is sovereign, no matter how things look. Sometimes in the Judges, things look terrible. But God is at work even in the weak and the undeserving. Later in the book of Ruth, which unfolds during this

same time period, we see how God works in individuals who go against the flow of the culture. God's purposes prevail. Trust him.

2. God wants to rule as Lord over every aspect of our lives. God wanted Israel to take the entire Promised Land. They tried to settle for less. In Judges half-hearted faith and partial obedience proves to be an impossible, unstable compromise that results in thorns and snares.

3. God faithfully offers his grace to people who do not deserve it, do not seek it, or even appreciate it after they have been delivered by it. There are very few truly good examples in Judges. It's all about God showing grace to foolish people and working out his grace in spite of their sin and stupidity. This is a God to know, and love and trust.

Conclusion

There's a problem that runs all through the Bible, including the book of Judges. In **verse 1**, God says, *"I will never break my covenant with you."* *How can a holy and righteous God keep the promises of grace he has sworn to keep and not seem to be indifferent to the disobedience of the people he loves? Will God just give up on his people because they disobey him? Will he just give in to his people even though they forget him and disobey him? This problem is a big part of what we call *The Story of God*" in the Scriptures. It is only in the story of Jesus that we discover God doesn't give up or give in. *He gives himself to give us grace.* God himself came into our world in Jesus. He came because of his love for broken people. He lived the life of faith and obedience we fail to live. He went willingly to the cross to suffer the judgment we deserve. He rose from the dead to be the true Savior for anyone who turns to him and trusts in him. He wants every square inch of your soul for your good and his glory. It begins by faith. You don't earn it. You receive grace when you trust in Jesus. Trust him as your Savior. And then, because as your Lord and Savior he charges you to begin the battle of a lifetime, to tear down every idol in your heart, to take back every inch of your life for God. To keep fighting, growing, pressing on, and to never give up.*

When Derek Raymond made it across the finish line in the Olympics, the crowd saw something beautiful. They saw someone who would not quit, and they saw a loving Father by his side. It was later revealed that when the Father reached him, Derek said, "I have to do this." And his father said, "We'll do it together." You have a Father in God who is

by your side. Lean on him, draw strength from him and keep fighting the good fight for him. Don't quit pressing on.

Amen

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/olympics/videos/10154450745724216/>

² https://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_grit_the_power_of_passion_and_perseverance?language=en

³ Judges, Ruth in *The New American Commentary*, Daniel Bock, p. 58

⁴ Judges 17:6 & 21:25

⁵ *Rebecca Manley Pippert, Out of the Saltshaker, page 48–49*