

An Illegitimate Power Grab

Judges 9

Notes

Unrighteousness may seem like a good idea at the time, but without repentance, it will grow and end in judgement.

INTRODUCTION

We often think of the Christian life as static, meaning stationary. We get to a certain place of righteousness, growth, or maturity in Christ and then we stop and maintain that level of maturity or growth for the next 40 years.

The truth is the Christian life is dynamic. Our walk with Christ is continual throughout our life and it effects and is affected by the rest of our life.

If we stop growing in Christ we do not stay where we stopped, we regress into complacency, then apathy, then nominalism, then degradation into sin.

On the night of March 29, 1848, Niagara Falls completely and mysteriously stopped flowing. The estimated 500,000 gallons of water that customarily rushed over the falls stalled to a trickle. James Francis Macklem, a village justice of the peace in the Niagara area, wrote that he had witnessed the subsidence of the waters and the phenomenon of the Niagara running dry "caused great excitement in the neighborhood at the time."

To some, the mystery of this sudden "turning off" of the river seemed to be an ominous sign, and nightfall found most of the churches packed with people praying or talking in frightened voices about the end of the world. Fear grew into the proportions of panic.

The cause of this unusual event began along the shores of Lake Erie near Buffalo. For several days, the wind had been blowing to the east over Lake Erie, driving much of its ice flow down river. Then the winds suddenly shifted to the west, driving the lake water west and causing the lake's ice to break up and dam the river. The Niagara River ceased to flow for almost 30 hours until the ice shifted, and the dam broke up.

When we become cold towards Christ and not let the Holy Spirit flow through our lives it can become disastrous.

Has your love for Christ grown cold? Have you stopped actively following Jesus? Are you struggling to pray and spend time with the Word of God?

Today, as we walk through Judges 9, we will see the effects of a life which has grown cold to God.

When there is an absence of growing righteousness, unrighteousness fills the void. (8:33-9:6)

Our text will begin in Chapter 8:33 as we see the aftereffects of Gideon's death.

³³ Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. ³⁴ Thus the sons of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; ³⁵ nor did they show kindness to the household of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in accord with all the good that he had done to Israel.

¹ And Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem to his mother's relatives, and spoke to them and to the whole clan of the household of his mother's father, saying, ² "Speak, now, in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem, 'Which is better for you, that seventy men, all the sons of Jerubbaal, rule over you, or that one man rule over you?' Also, remember that I am your bone and your flesh." ³ And his mother's relatives spoke all these words on his behalf in the hearing of all the leaders of Shechem; and they were inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our relative." ⁴ They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal-berith with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless fellows, and they followed him. ⁵ Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself. ⁶ All the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was in Shechem.

As we open the story, we see the immediate effects of Gideon's unrighteousness in making the ephod in Chapter 8. Gideon's ephod sent Israel into the arms of the false god, Baal.

Upon Gideon's death the nation which followed him and was rescued from Midian by him, not only forgot the good he did, but they did also not treat his sons or family with any kindness.

So here, right in the beginning, we already see the effects of unrepentant unrighteousness.

Then, when we get into Chapter 9, we see one of the sons of Gideon, Abimelech, an illegitimate son by his concubine, rise up and make a bid for power.

He goes to his mother's family in Shechem and tells them to decide if they would rather be ruled by a single ruler who was their kin, or by 70 who were of no kin to them.

They like that idea and so they give him 70 pieces of money and he hires mercenaries to capture his brothers.

He brings his 70 brothers to the temple of Baal and slaughters them on a single stone.

It is interesting to note a connection here.

Gideon led his people to worship the false god Baal with the ephod and it was at the temple of Baal that Abimelech killed all his sons.

What we see here is a classic biblical principle. Where there is an absence of growing righteousness, unrighteousness begins to grow.

And when unrighteousness grows unrestrained, it knows no bounds.

Look at this example played out in society over the last 70 years.

The sexual revolution of the 60s led to the-

Rise of second wave feminism of the 70s-

And the advent of birth control which said that a woman has a right to be not pregnant like a man-

Which led to the passage of Roe v. Wade making abortion legal-

Followed by the no fault divorce making it easier for marriages and families to be split apart-

And as families are split apart, we see the rise in poverty and social problems-

This continues for a generation as we see the rise of the homosexual revolution begin to take steam in the early 2000s-

The slow and deliberate implementation in television and media makes this- abnormal lifestyle normal

This leads to the Obergefell decision by the Supreme Court in 2015 legalizing gay marriage in all 50 states-

And within the span of 5 years the rise of transgenderism has taken over society in such a way we don't even know what a man is, or a woman is-

This has led to the collapse of girls and women's sports and the hard-fought battles for women in society-

And if we don't know what a woman is, and we don't know what a man is, we can't know what a family is and if we don't know what a family is we do not and cannot have a functioning or flourishing society.

Sin, beloved, unchecked, knows no bounds.

Before we get all up in arms about sin in our society, let us first check the unrepentant sin in our own hearts.

For we are not directly responsible for the sin of others, but we are responsible for the sin in our own hearts and lives.

When we allow ourselves the freedom to stop growing in righteousness, unrighteousness will take over.

What about you this morning? If you are honest right now, is your walk with Christ active? Are you actively pursuing and enjoying Jesus?

There is no such thing as an idle or nominal follower of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is either following Jesus or going their own way.

The truly righteous will stand even when others don't (9:7-9:21) (9:7, 19-20)

Jotham, Gideon's one remaining legitimate son escapes and tells a parable of three trees.

Three trees asked to rule, each says "no." Then the briar bush was asked to rule. The briar bush was low and could not provide shade or shelter but offers it anyway.

This is an allegory for what happens with Abimelech.

¹⁶Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim and lifted his voice and called out. Thus, he said to them, "Listen to me, O men of Shechem, that God may listen to you.

¹⁹if then you have dealt in truth and integrity with Jerubbaal and his house this day, rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. ²⁰But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech."

We learn in verse 5 the youngest of Gideon's sons, Jotham, escapes the massacre.

After the murder of his brothers, he went to the top of Mt. Gerizim, just south of the city of Shechem, and makes a proclamation to the city.

He basically tells them that if they have acted righteously, they have nothing to worry about, but if they had not then they will face God's judgement.

We know they did not act righteous, so this proclamation can be seen as kind of a prophecy.

There was no one telling Jotham to do this. He knew he needed to stand up for what was right, even though it was dangerous, even though it went against societal norms.

The same is true for the believer in Christ.

There will be times to stand even when it is unpopular

While we should absolutely stand up for biblical morals and ethics in society, I think we need to take a more grounded approach.

Sure, we stand up for righteousness, and we defend the weak and broken.

We yell loud for the things of God on the local, state, and national level.

But what we are called to do more than anything is to shout loud the gospel.

If we stand up for all biblical truth and denounce all unrighteousness without proclaiming and living out the gospel, we provide no avenue for the unrighteous to experience redemption.

We must make sharing the gospel the most important part of our standing up and standing out for God.

If we are accused of being bigots, judgmental, and hypocrites without sharing the gospel we lose.

If the people around you know what you are against and not what are for (the gospel) then you are more focused on their self-righteousness than Christ's righteousness for them.

Don't mistake God's lack of immediate judgement of sin for approval (9:22-9:57)

²² Now Abimelech ruled over Israel three years.²³ Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,²⁴ so that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers.²⁵ The men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who might pass by them along the road; and it was told to Abimelech.

²⁶ Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his relatives and crossed over into Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their trust in him.²⁷ They went out into the field and gathered the grapes of their vineyards and trod them and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and cursed Abimelech.²⁸ Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is Zebul not his lieutenant? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him?²⁹ Would, therefore, that this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." And he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out."

SKIP TO VERSE 45

⁴⁵ Abimelech fought against the city all that day, and he captured the city and killed the people who were in it; then he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

SKIP TO VERSE 49

⁴⁹ All the people also cut down each one his branch and followed Abimelech, and put them on the inner chamber and set the inner chamber on fire over those inside, so that all the men of the tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

⁵⁰ Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he camped against Thebez and captured it.⁵¹ But there was a strong tower in the center of the city, and all the men and women with all the leaders of the city fled there and shut themselves in; and they went up on the roof of the tower.⁵² So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.⁵³ But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, crushing his skull.⁵⁴ Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that it will not be said of me, 'A woman slew him.'" So the young man pierced him through, and he died.⁵⁵ When the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, each departed to his home.⁵⁶ Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father in killing his seventy brothers.⁵⁷ Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads, and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.

God often works in silence when it seems as though he is not working at all

If you read the whole story, you get the sense that God is not concerned, nor involved in this period of history.

I want to direct your attention to two verses.

9:23, *“God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech.”*

9:56, *“Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers.”*

Between 8:34 and 10:6 God is not mentioned at all by his covenant name, the Lord.

This shows us how the leader and rulers of society desired to push God out completely.

So, is God absent?

No. In verses 23 and 56 we see hints of what God was doing.

God sent an evil spirit to disrupt the trust between Abimelech and Shechem which prepared them to receive the new ruler, Gaal.

God allowed all this to happen, we see in verse 56 to bring justice to the evil Abimelech and Shechem had done.

Don't be discouraged when it seems like God is not concerned about evil. God will judge justly and completely.

God may be silent, but he is never absent.

God allowed Abimelech to rise up and completely destroy the city of Shechem, even burning and salting it so that nothing could be built or grow there.

He then traps all the leaders and their families in a tower and burns them all.

Following his destruction of Shechem, he turns his attention to another city and as he tries the same approach of killing the people in the tower, a woman drops a stone on his head and kills him.

Abimelech was so concerned about coming into power and replacing his fathers' name with his own yet ends up being killed by a woman.

He killed his brothers on a single stone and he himself was killed by a single stone.

You could read the entirety of Chapter 9 and wonder where God was and why he let the events transpire.

But God was working behind the scenes, using the sin of men to bring judgment upon themselves.

God's judgement will come and when it comes it will be complete and permanent.

We want justice now, but even earthly justice done in a timely matter, cannot compare to God's eternal justice.

I want to make a statement that is drawn, not from the text, but from the principle of the text.

God's silence during your times of struggle and heartache, does not mean he doesn't care or is not listening. God's silence in your life, during times of hurt, is often meant to draw you closer to him so you can hear his tender mercies.

God is gracious, even when we don't deserve it (10:1-5)

Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. ² He judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir. ³ After him, Jair the Gileadite arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. ⁴ He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. ⁵ And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

We see here, a wonderful display of God's grace and goodness toward underserving and even unrepentant sinners.

God will always keep and provide for his children.

God raised up Tola to save Israel and brought 23 years of peace. Following his death, we see God raised up Jair and judged Israel 22 years.

Even in their sin, God brought two men who led them to 45 years of peace and prosperity.

We might look at that and say, "Why God?" "They did not deserve your grace!"

And you would absolutely be correct. But that is how grace works.

Rom. 5:8, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

Before a single person repented; knowing not a one of us would ever be worthy; knowing that even after our salvation we would still be selfish, greedy, idolators- he still died for us-for you!

We want justice, but what we need is grace.

This truth is important for us in 3 ways this morning:

Show grace to the lost sinner instead of giving them justice

Cling to God's grace in our own life

Come to encounter God's grace right now if you are lost

Would you cling to God's grace this morning? Come and experience the healing and redeeming power of Jesus. Experience his tender embrace.

CONCLUSION

Are you living with unrighteousness?

In the movie Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief, young Percy is tasked with going to the Underworld to talk to the Greek God Hades. On his journey he and his friends visit a hotel and while there they are given a lotus flower to eat. As they eat this flower, they lose all sense of time and become dull to the effects of the flower.

Percy snaps out of the spell after hearing his father call his name and tell him not to eat any more flowers.

I think that is the problem for some of us. We've become institutionalized to sin, to this world. We focus our attention on these earthly walls, only what we can touch, feel, observe, and enjoy. We have gotten used to them, as time has passed, we have begun to depend on them.

God is repeatedly trying to get our attention. He is calling out to us, to you this morning.

He's saying, "Look, don't trust this world. Don't allow the temptations of the is world, the dulling of sin to keep you trapped and to keep you from the righteousness of Jesus."

Break free from the bonds of sin and unrighteousness. Name the sin in your heart. Own it.

Anger, hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness. Lust, greed, pride, selfishness. Idolatry, laziness, complacency, disobedience.

Own your sin and then run to Jesus this morning.

Maybe you are here this morning and you have been struggling with living with unrighteousness in your life.

You may say, "It's not my whole life. I'm pretty good in most areas, it's just this one thing I have."

A little unrighteousness in one area of life will infect and effect your whole life.

I want to ask you to review your heart this morning.

For you, maybe you struggle with sinful thoughts or a sinful attitude.

Maybe you struggle with anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness.

Maybe for others it's a sinful habit that you can't seem to break.

For others, maybe it's a sin of omission. God is calling you to do something and has for some time, but you have just actively disobeyed him.

We desire to be a people, a church that is seeking after God's heart and his heart is one of holiness and righteousness. He desires his church, those Jesus died for, to live in holiness and righteousness.

It does us no good to pretend to be holy and righteous. The way we live out holiness and righteousness is to actively live in repentance.

Holiness and righteousness are achieved through continual drawing near to Jesus.

Let us not put off true, life-giving repentance this morning. If you are here and you are struggling, or maybe you are living full force in sin, Jesus is calling to you this morning.

Come to him. Don't wait. Life without repentance brings judgement. Repentance brings grace and righteousness. Which will you choose this morning?