

Before the service started this morning, we had a chance to see a video that quickly summarized the first eight chapters of *The Story*. And now leading into this sermon, I'd like to show you a short video that summarizes just Chapter 8, which is a condensed version of the book of Judges. As you watch it, I want you to ask yourself: "What is God teaching us today through this story?" Sometimes when we read the Old Testament we ask ourselves, "What does this have to do with today?" So ask yourself that question (review major themes in the book of Judges)

How many of you noticed a pattern or a repeating cycle, in this story?
Albert Einstein once said that insanity is, "doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results."

Right at the beginning of the book of Judges we learn what happened to the people of Israel after Joshua died. And this helps answer the question: "Why did the people turn away from God?"

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. ¹² They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them.¹

So why did the people turn away from God? So why did this generation after Joshua completely walk away?

"Another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel." They had forgotten the story, right?

I don't know if you had the same reaction that I did as I read this chapter but I started getting a little weary of this same cycle repeating over and over again. It happens six different times in the book of Judges.

Let me try to illustrate it for you:

Sin ⇒ Oppression ⇒ Cry Out ⇒ Rescue

So the first generation after Joshua forgets about the Lord... evidently their parents didn't teach them the story... and they didn't know what God had done for them bringing them out of Egypt. And so like we said a couple of weeks ago, when we forget God, or when we take Him for granted, we break His commandments, right? So the first part of the cycle is Sin.

Sin ⇨

So when they forgot about God they started worshipping false gods, their neighbor's gods, their friends gods, and they intermarried.

And if you look at the archeological evidence from that period you find all this little statue gods, gods of fertility, gods of agriculture, rain gods and sun gods, and you name it... they just bought into this idea that that's how you make a life. You worship these gods and you will have good luck.

Sin ⇨ Oppression

But sin always leads to brokenness. And brokenness leads to weakness. And their enemies took advantage of their weakness. And God allowed them to be overpowered until they became slaves once again.

So they began to experience the consequences of their sin. And what happens to us when we experience the consequences of our sin? **We** suffer, right? **We** experience pain.

So out of their pain and out their suffering we see the next part of the cycle. They began to cry out. And we hear how the people of Israel finally **remembered** God, and they called out for help.

Sin ⇨ Oppression ⇨ Cry Out

And then what was the last part of the cycle? What happened after they cried out? Did God hear them? That's right, not only did God hear them, He took mercy on them, and God rescued them. At that point in history, God rescued them by raising up Spirit-filled leaders we call judges. God sent them a rescuer, someone who would lead them to follow God's ways.

Sin ⇨ Oppression ⇨ Cry Out ⇨ Rescue

And what would was the result? Just like we talked about last week, instead of experiencing suffering and pain they would begin to experience God's shalom – this full deep, flourishing of human life. And for another generation they experienced the blessings God meant for them, the blessings God gave them so that they might share those blessings with those around them, to be a light to the nations. And so that's the cycle we see all the way through the book of Judges.

So when you ask yourself, what is God teaching us today, what would you say?
Do we see this cycle repeated throughout history, and even today?

One observer of history has stated that:

“The average life of the world's greatest civilizations has been about 200 years. During this period each has progressed through the following stages.

1. From bondage to spiritual faith.
2. From spiritual faith to great courage.
3. From courage to liberty.
4. From liberty to abundance.

5. From abundance to selfishness.
6. From selfishness to complacency.
7. From complacency to apathy.
8. From apathy to dependency.
9. And the last stage: From dependency back to bondage.ⁱⁱ

Just think for a moment about the history of our own county. What would you say has made this country what it is today? Is it our cherished freedoms?

I think a lot of people would agree with that.

But what happens to freedom in a vacuum?

What happens when freedom has no context, no story, and no purpose?

What if the people who enjoy freedom define it only in terms of freedom to do whatever you please? That's what we hear throughout the book of Judges. The people forgot God, and they did whatever they thought was right, in their own eyes. They used their freedom, but they used it inappropriately. They used it to do whatever they pleased.

Before his death on July 4, 1826,

Thomas Jefferson left explicit instructions for what the epitaph on his tombstone should read:

“Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia.”

Yet within a few years of his death, his beloved University of Virginia was in deep trouble, and what would wind up saving it would have been a shock to its founder.

Jefferson's vision for UVA was that of an “academic village” and a “forward-looking community with no religious affiliation.”ⁱⁱⁱ It was to be a place where “Virginia's best minds could go to study with the world's best scholars.”

But within a few years after its founding, UVA was none of these things. The level of violence at UVA during its first decades is difficult for the modern mind to fathom. The young men at this University had “hair-trigger tempers” and the slightest insult was to set off fights that employed every conceivable weapon: teeth, fists, rocks, knives, firearms, and even bombs. One student even murdered a professor!

Researcher Carlos Santos writes “every attempt by the faculty to reign in the culture of violence and disorder “failed miserably.”

The violence at UVA literally brought Jefferson to tears and had him, as well as the faculty, concerned for the future of the university. It called into question Jefferson's controversial vision of a secular university where the pursuit of truth would be unencumbered by religious dogma.

Virginia taxpayers questioned whether their money should go to pay for this failed experiment. Well as we know years later, the Univ. of Virginia survived and went on to thrive.

But why?

Because, as UVA historian Peter Onuf put it, UVA students didn't get enlightened—"they got Jesus."

Have you ever heard about the Second Great Awakening? It was a spiritual revival that swept through this country and changed cities, and towns, and institutions, because it changed the people in all those places.

Well, the Second Great Awakening also swept through Charlottesville and changed the culture of the University of Virginia. And even though some students were still "acting out," Onuf says there was also "the beginning of a new culture on the campus—a more evangelical, religious culture."

Sometimes one generation takes God for granted.

Maybe the parents of those first UVA students were Christians, but in those days, and even in our own, we sometimes are hesitant to share with our children what we believe. Faith is a personal thing. Faith is deeply personal.

But what happens when one generation, just assumes the next generation will follow in their footsteps? What happens when parents don't share with their children in words and deeds who God is, and what a difference God has made in their lives?

Why did Moses, towards the end of his life, when he gave his farewell address why did he place such an emphasis on teaching the next generation?

When he said:

"These commandments that I give you, today, are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down at night, and when you get up in the morning."

Let me share a story with you:

A father took his four-year-old daughter Anna to the dry cleaners. The lady behind the counter thought she was so cute, she gave Anna a dollar as a gift. Anna was so excited that as soon as they arrived home she ran into the house to tell everyone about it.

Abigail, her six-year-old sister, was not excited, however— it really bothered her that there wasn't a dollar for her as well.

So the father sat down with Abigail, and said: "You love your sister, right? Then you should be happy when good things happen to her." Through her tears, and in all sincerity, Abigail replied, "I know I should be happy for her, but I just can't."

There's a real difference between knowing the right thing to do and doing it.
 There's a big difference between knowing about this cycle, of sin, (show diagram)

Sin ⇒ Oppression ⇒ Cry Out ⇒ Rescue

and not falling into the same trap, over and over again.

Let me quickly share with you four things, that won't help, and then two things that will.

Our culture would say that the answer to producing good behavior is to do these four things:

1. Add rules.

This is a favorite of politicians and some parents.

They believe more rules and regulations may make unethical behavior more difficult to engage in, but children and adults who lack virtue tend to simply find new ways of getting around rules.

2. Offer incentives.

The idea here is to bribe people and companies to comply with certain standards of behavior. The problem is that when the incentives go away, often so does the "learned" behavior. Besides, in our culture there's nearly always more incentive to something wrong than to do something right.

3. More education.

"If only people were enlightened through education, they would clearly recognize the value of being a good person."

We try to do this in our schools with character education. We assume you can teach good character without the religious or spiritual foundation that undergirds character and gives it shape and meaning and purpose.

And as we learned in the history of the University of Virginia this is not very effective. Throughout history, some of the most educated individuals have often done the most damage to cultures and people.

Now the fourth one at least appears to be a good idea. We see it in self-help books, and we hear from afternoon television hosts. And it goes something like this:

- 4. Just look within, and find Yourself.** If you really get in touch with who you are, you'll find out that you are a good person, and it will help you find the right path in life. To thine oneself be true. I'm okay, you're okay.

But the reality is that we are **not** okay. Our human nature is bent or turned inwards... that's what sin is...to be turned in on ourselves, to desire our own comfort, and our own plans to forget God, and God's purposes for our lives.

And into this story of our own brokenness, our own cycle of sin, God did something to interrupt history. God did something worthy of the word, "Revolutionary."

Because God broke this cycle.
 God turned this world upside down or rather right side up.

We are not alone.
 We are not defenseless against the temptations that come at us.
 God gave us a Savior, his very own Son, a Rescuer who lifts us out of this cycle by the strength and power of his death and resurrection!

In the past, God heard his people cry out
 and God interrupted that cycle, temporarily, by calling Spirit-filled judges to restore Shalom.

But in his Son Jesus, God has once and for all time, broken the power of sin.
 Sin and death have no power over us.

Knowing this story and sharing this story breaks the power of sin.
 God whose love never fails, invites us into a relationship, and then Christ goes to work on our hearts and minds, and transforms us from the inside out.

So keep these two things in mind as you walk with Jesus.

1. Jesus promises: "Abide in me and I will abide in you."

Invite Jesus into your life every day. Walk with Him through your day, in your morning, devotions, in your prayers throughout the day.

Fix your eyes on Jesus.
 Because the more we look to Jesus, the more we look like Jesus.
 "Abide in me, and I will abide in you... and you will bear much fruit."
 As Jesus lives in you, Jesus will live through you.

And second, remember this:
 Not only fix your eyes on Jesus and abide in Him, but remember this:

2. Jesus promised to send us His Holy Spirit.

He told his disciples before He ascended to Heaven.
 "I will not leave you as orphans"
 "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth."

So in your prayers, ask God also to send you His Holy Spirit. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you in the truth, to help you discern which ways to walk, not to walk in the ways of the flesh, but to walk in the Spirit.

And ask God to give you a sensitivity to promptings from the Holy Spirit and a heart that is tender and ready to be corrected.

If you feel like you've walked away from God, or your heart is calloused
It's never too late. God is always pursuing you in love.

Even now, God may be calling you.
Listen to His voice and let Him in. Amen.

ⁱ Judges 2:10-12

ⁱⁱ Commonly known as the "Tytler Cycle" or the "Fatal Sequence" Its first known appearance was in a 1943 speech by Henning W. Prentiss, Jr., president of the Armstrong Cork Company, delivered at the February 1943 convocation of the General Alumni Society of the University of Pennsylvania.

ⁱⁱⁱ As Carlos Santos and Rex Bowman tell us in their book, "Rot, Riot and Rebellion: Mr. Jefferson's Struggle to Save the University That Changed America,"