

JUDGES SESSION #12

In this session we will see the first recorded **parable** in Bible...yes, the first one shows up in the OT not the NT.. but like the more familiar NT parables, this one conveys a basic but crucial truth for you & for me if we are going to live successful lives

- let me set it up with a brief story from the ministry of the great 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon
 - Spurgeon was sharing speaking responsibilities with another preacher at a conference; this other speaker publicly affirmed that it was possible for a Christian to attain *sinless perfection* & suggested modestly that he had realized this in his own life and was enjoying sinless perfection!
 - Spurgeon was disturbed about this kind of teaching so the next morning he crept up behind this man at breakfast & poured a jug of milk on his head...the man exploded with anger and everyone quickly discovered that the man still had his sinful nature – he was definitely *not* perfect as he had claimed to be!
- No, we Christians are not perfect, and will never attain perfection in this life
 - instead, we experience inner conflict, a **'civil war'** as Paul makes clear in Rom. 7:21-24 (Living Bible)

“It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is **at war** with my mind and wins the fight and **makes me a slave to the sin** that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant, but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?”

- that's a very important question! ...and Paul goes on to provide the answer (let me quote the next 3 verses from The Message translation):

“Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?
The answer, thank God, is that **Jesus Christ can and does**. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different. With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. **A new power is in operation**. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.”
- victory **is** available! But it is a victory in the *midst* of conflict, not victory over *conflict*
- keep this NT truth in mind as we pick up the Book of Judges once again and plunge into the fascinating – and terrible – story of **Abimelech**

Judg 8:33-9:6

³³ So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. ³⁴ Thus the children 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 house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to **Shechem**, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father,

saying, ²"Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone."

³ And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." ⁴ So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. ⁵ Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. ⁶ And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that *was* in Shechem.

[A. The Conflict for Control]

We begin by looking at the "conflict for control"

- notice the influence this wicked man had from his **parents**
 - his **father** was Gideon, and no doubt there was some godly influence there
 - but at the same time, Gideon made a big mistake – as you will recall – by giving his son this particular name: **Abimelech** = "my father is king"!
 - even though Gideon had refused the offer of the people to become their king, he took on a lifestyle that looked 'kingly' and passed on a false expectation to this son Abimelech
- his **mother** was a concubine, not Gideon's wife; apparently a *Canaanite* woman who influenced her son away from God and towards the false worship of the Canaanite god Baal
- notice the influence of his **city**
 - ...**Shechem** was now a Canaanite city saturated with Baal worship
 - what a contrast with the earlier history of Shechem as a *special place* for God's people!
 - ...this was the place where God first revealed Himself to **Abraham** when he got to this promised land
 - ...later **Joseph's bones** were brought back from Egypt and buried here at Shechem
 - ...under **Joshua**, the people renewed their covenant with God here at Shechem; and later, Joshua delivered his **final exhortation** to the nation here with a large stone set up as a memorial to their Covenant with God
 - ...and in the time of the judges, the sacred **ark of God** was situated just a few miles south, in Shiloh
- so here is the picture as we are introduced to Abimelech:
 - he is a man with a **mixed heritage**, part Israelite & part Canaanite
 - he comes from **Shechem** – a **mixed town** of Israelites & Canaanites
 - and a town which is the center of a **mixed-up form of Baal worship** combining elements of true religion & false idolatry focusing on the worship of Baal-Berith ("lord of the *Covenant*" – a title which only Jehovah God should have)
- now this mass murderer has been made 'king' by the people of Shechem!
- ...the tragic story of Abimelech illustrates a major truth:
 - when there is a **spiritual vacuum**, Satan will rush in to fill it

- this is true even for Christians: if we reject the true King, we will be ruled by a power-hungry false ruler; if we are not practicing the lordship of Christ, then we set up a 'power vacuum' which will be filled by a 'ruthless king'

- **Rom. 6:16** – “Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to **sin**, which leads to death, or to **obedience**, which leads to righteousness?”

- in other words, if **Jesus** does not rule my life, my **sinful nature** will

Gal 5:17 - “we naturally love to do evil things that are just the opposite from the things that the Holy Spirit tells us to do; and the good things we want to do when the Spirit has his way with us are just the opposite of our natural desires. These two forces within us are constantly fighting each other to win control over us, and our wishes are never free from their pressures.”

...as Christian believers you and I are involved in a constant **inner conflict** – I'm sure you've felt it, as I have; and too often the wrong side wins!

- the only resolution is to **walk in the Spirit** ...which means to live in conscious submission, obedience & dependence upon the Lord Jesus

Let me remind you of the fable about the scorpion and the turtle:

A scorpion, being a very poor swimmer, asked a turtle to carry him on its back across the river. "Are you mad?" exclaimed the turtle. "You'll sting me while I'm swimming and I'll drown." "My dear turtle," laughed the scorpion, "If I were to sting you, you would drown and I'd go down with you. Now where is the logic in that?" "You're right," cried the turtle. "Hop on." The scorpion climbed up on the turtle's back and halfway across the river gave the turtle a mighty sting. As they both sank to the bottom, the turtle, angry but resigned to his fate, said, "Do you mind if I ask you something? You said there is **no logic** in your stinging me. So **Why** did you do it?"

"It has nothing to do with logic," the drowning scorpion replied. "It's just **my nature**."

- our sinful nature is seductively persuasive & doesn't operate logically either – it is destructive & deadly simply 'by nature'!

- so we have only two alternatives: allow the deadly nature of our **flesh** to rule us, or allow the Holy **Spirit** to rule us ...which takes us to the next part of the story in Judges...this includes that very early parable I mentioned in the introduction, giving us the...:

B. The Principle of Control

Judg 9:7-21

⁷ Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them:

"Listen to me, you men of Shechem, That God may listen to you!

⁸ "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them.

And they said to the **olive tree**, 'Reign over us!'

⁹ But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, With which they honor God and men, And go to sway over trees?'

¹⁰ "Then the trees said to the **fig tree**, 'You come *and* reign over us!'

¹¹ But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, And go to sway over trees?'

¹² "Then the trees said to the **vine**, 'You come *and* reign over us!'

¹³ But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers *both* God and men, And go to sway over trees?'

¹⁴ "Then all the trees said to the **bramble**, 'You come *and* reign over us!'

¹⁵ And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, *Then* come *and* take shelter in my shade; But if not, let **fire** come out of the bramble And devour the cedars of Lebanon!'

¹⁶ "Now therefore [Jotham continues], if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves — ¹⁷ for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; ¹⁸ but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother — ¹⁹ if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. ²⁰ But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" ²¹ And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

- Jotham's **parable** of the trees was delivered from an outcrop of rock on Mt. Gerazim, overlooking Shechem, a rock which is still called *Jotham's pulpit* today
 - the olive tree, the fig tree, the grape vine ...none of them wanted to rule; they simply wanted to function as God intended them to function: bearing fruit
 - ...they provide a picture of **productive people** fulfilling their proper roles in society; bearing good fruit
 - the **bramble bush** on the other hand, is useless; it produces no fruit; and in fact it can be dangerous because it could easily catch on fire in summer; the bramble is a product of God's curse on the earth
 - ...in Jotham's parable, Abimelech is the bramble bush, or thornbush
 - he was not oriented toward productive work, but toward **power**, prestige & control
 - *principle of Jotham's parable is this:*
 - the spiritual vacuum in Israel was not being filled by fruit-bearing, useful, godly men ... but by a useless, worthless, dangerous **bramble bush: Abimelech**
 - in NT terms, our old nature – the '**flesh**' – is a thornbush
 - it only produces destruction, not good fruit
- Gal 5:19-21 (Living Bible translation again): "But when you follow your own wrong inclinations [or, impulses of our flesh], your lives will produce these evil results: impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, spiritism (that is, encouraging the activity of demons), hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticisms, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group-- and there will be wrong doctrine, envy, murder, drunkenness, wild parties, and all that sort of thing. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone **living that sort of life** will not inherit the Kingdom of God."
- Paul isn't talking about committing sin from time to time, as we all do; he said "anyone **living that sort of life...**" – in other words, following our own wrong inclinations (the desires of our sinful nature) as a **lifestyle**

A visitor at a fishing dock asked an old fisherman who was sitting there, "If I were to fall into this water, would I drown?"

It was a strange way of asking how deep the water was, but the fisherman had a good answer. "No," he said. "Fallin' into the water doesn't drown anybody. It's **staying under it** that does."

- so what will it be with us? ... 'staying under' the influence of our old nature & producing some of those destructive results Paul listed?

- or 'walking in the Spirit' and producing the kind of fruit that blesses our lives & refreshes/lifts up others?

...the **principle of control** is this: my life will **show the results** of who controls it

- my flesh

... or God's Holy Spirit

So, who is in control in YOUR life?