**Change Can Be Tough: Part Two**

**Text:** Judges 1:1-10

**Review:** Good Morning! Today we’re going to continue our series of studies in the Book Judges which I began before that ill-fated bicycle ride more than a month ago. The Book of Judges is in the section of Scripture called the Early Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Personally, I think that is a better emphasis than the “Historical Books” to which it is assigned in our English Bibles. Judges covers a period of 326 years, from 1373 – 1047 BC. If you add up the chronology of the various judges you will find the total well over 400 years. There is no error in this apparent discrepancy. Some of the judges’ rules certainly overlapped.

The judges were non-dynastic military and civil leaders called by God to deliver Israel from foreign oppression allowed by God because of Israel’s covenant failure. The Book was evidently written after the monarchy was established. The final verse concludes, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” It is speculated that Samuel wrote Judges, but we cannot be certain.

In our first study we considered the theme of how tough change can be. There will always be changes. We noted first the context. Nothing is permanent except God and His Word. Israel lost Moses. He was replaced by Joshua. Then Joshua too passed away. But the will work and work of God would continue. Each of us must decide daily whether God will accomplish His will through us or in spite of us. Will we continue serving God when unwanted change interrupts our life? Most believers are content to live for God until it is no longer expedient for them. When it hurts or costs you something precious to serve Christ, what will you do?

Next, we considered the concern in verse 1. In prayer they asked God, “Who shall go up for us first?” I emphasized that while it is always a good thing to inquire of the Lord, we should never allow our prayers to devolve into a stall tactic on our part. Each tribe was responsible to clear the remaining remnants of Canaanites from their own territories. It is easier to pray than to do what we know we should be doing but don’t really want to do. Life really is too short to waste our time and test God’s patience by praying about things for which God has already revealed His will.

Then we gave thought to the command in verse 2. Judah should go first. This was rather obvious. Judah was the most powerful tribe. Judah inherited the coveted birthright forfeited by his three older brothers because of their sin. The tribe of Judah would rule the other tribes. But with privilege comes responsibility. Some are annoyed at God’s preference for Judah. We need to understand that God blesses and honors those who cheerfully obey His Word. If it seems that God pays no attention to you, please remember that God prefers people of faith!

*The Cooperation (3).*

Now let’s give some thought to the cooperation we find in verse 3. After being told that they would lead the nation in the fight, and that God would deliver the land into their hands, Judah asked Simeon to fight alongside them. What does the Spirit of God intend for us to learn from that? A survey of commentaries won’t give any consensus. Quite a few Bible “scholars” think the men of Judah were unsure of themselves and thus looked for others to help them in the fight for which they lacked confidence. Of course, the text does not say why they asked Simeon to cooperate in this battle.

Sometimes God withholds judgment as to the actions of His people. Here we find no divine criticism nor praise for this cooperation. Since Simeon did not weaken the resolve of Judah, and together they gained victory over all the area of the south except for certain plains where the enemy had chariots of iron (vs 19), it seems this cooperation was relatively good for both tribes.

You may not be aware, but Simeon’s inheritance in the land was surrounded by Judah’s inheritance, thus it makes some sense that they were asked to cooperate in the battle with Judah. In his prophecy, Jacob pronounced in Genesis 49 concerning Levi and Simeon, “I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.” And so it was that Levi got no tribal land inheritance, and Simeon was scattered in Judah.

Also, Simeon was Judah’s full brother. Both were sons of Jacob through Leah. However, while Judah had grown to be the most powerful tribe in Israel, Simeon was one of the weakest tribes. Part of good leadership is to strengthen those who are weak. Simeon could have gained confidence by cooperating and doing their share alongside Judah. There are always plenty of people in churches who stand in need of strengthening. They are good people and love Christ enough to be in church, most of the time. But with a little encouraging, they can accomplish a lot of good things for their Lord.

Does this mean their motive is not commendable? They can’t really be said to serve for love of the Saviour if they need to be cajoled into doing what is right. I do think there can be much reward to those who have to be talked into serving Christ. Does that then mean we should not encourage others who are hesitant to serve? Not at all! Even if they are not gaining treasure in heaven, their life on earth will be the better for associating and assisting those God has sent out in forefront of the battle. And that is what they are concerned with gaining. No one who has to be talked into going out soul winning is concerned about laying up treasure in heaven. Their focus is entirely on this life. But doing right, even if one does so hesitantly, will always make this life better because we invariably reap what we sow.

We should always try to help those with a weaker faith. It does no one any good to overlook them or to look down upon them or shame them. Their faith could increase due to our offer of cooperation. Compared to our Saviour, the strongest among us is utterly contemptable. God knows we all do best when we cooperate, encourage, and strengthen one another. Don’t you agree? I think it is safe to extrapolate from this passage that cooperation is much better than contention. I am not at all advocating compromise, only for a willingness to cooperate, even with those who annoy us personally.

We do not help others or ourselves when we pick at the problems of those who are weaker and browbeat them. Certain Christian leaders seem to think that abusing, manipulating, and shaming those who are weak or unstable will strengthen them. Shaming those who do not make our standard might be the Marine Corp way, but it is not the Bible way. That is a horrible thing to do!

Again, I am not saying we ought to condone sin or consider compromising doctrine, but why tear someone down when you can build them up. Maybe despite your best efforts they never grow stronger spiritually. I think God will bless us for trying. I don’t think He will bless us for shaming a fellow brother or sister and driving them away from church. Fighting Satan is enough for us, we don’t need to pick fights with one other, or hurt one another, when we could lift them up and let them fight alongside us! Let’s strengthen those who are feeble and not kick their feet out from under them.

*The Conflict (4).*

Now, please look at verse 4. Here we find conflict taking place with the Canaanites. They eventually stopped praying for answers they already knew. They strapped on their swords and grabbed their shields and headed to the fight. God gave them victory over what may have been the most powerful remaining king in the land, Adoni-Bezek.

We all want to celebrate victories. We all want a gold medal hanging around our necks. We all want to be feted and honored. But victories do not come without conflict and contention. God’s people are expected to behave as courageous soldiers. That means standing for truth and righteousness. It means opposing ungodliness and wickedness. Israel had trouble doing that consistently, and so do we. Remember that it was not the whole nation who made the golden calf and danced naked before it. Only about 3,000 did that. But the rest of the nation stood by passively and said nothing.

Today many Christians will not even vote according to their faith. They vote according to the pocketbook. They support candidates who endorsed by the trade unions they are members of even though that candidate will support all manner of ungodly legislation. If you knowingly vote for a candidate that supports homosexuality and abortion on demand, how will you explain yourself to Christ when you give an account of your stewardship? If you want wear a heavenly crown and receive heavenly applause, be ready to fight the good fight!

Our warfare is not accomplished by pouring our drink over the head of someone who supports the politics we hate. In fact, it isn’t even accomplished through politics save for voting our conscience. It is done by obeying Scripture. By being a witness for Christ. By being faithful to the body of Christ. By living a righteous and godly life!

*The Comeuppance (5-7).*

Quickly, I would like us to see two more things from our text. Notice the comeuppance Adoni-Bezek received. That evil man had been 70-0 in battles before that day. He mutilated and humiliated the kings of those he defeated by cutting off their thumbs and big toes. Then they had to beg for their bread from the floor under his table like dogs.

He was given the same treatment that he had inflicted on others. This method of judgment was biblical. The Bible demanded an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. Apparently, Judah kept him on a leash for a while so he could experience the pain and degradation he had administer to others. Then he was taken to Jerusalem, the last great Canaanite citadel, so he could watch it being defeated. After they had smitten that great city, he died there. He got exactly what he deserved.

Even if it seems some do not get what they deserve, God is not mocked. Every sin will fairly adjudicated by the impartial Judge of all. Even if we never learn of it. There is no reason for a Christian to live in bitterness. If the ones who wronged us repent and seek our forgiveness, we should give it without hesitation else we show how little God’s forgiveness of our sins means to us. If they refuse to repent, we can leave the matter to God. We should never surrender our peace of mind by hating those who did us wrong. Christ’s death was sufficient for their forgiveness as well as ours. It will all be sorted out equitably. Our great concern should not be that others get their comeuppance. It should be that our hearts are right with God and stay that way!

*The Culmination (8-10).*

Let us conclude with verses 8-10. Here we find the culmination of the matter. It is not an entirely positive post-script. They gained the victory, even over the mighty fortress at Jerusalem. They did not, however, occupy Jerusalem after destroying it. Therefore, it was rebuilt soon afterwards by the Canaanites and not conquered again till David was king in Israel.

The people might have been anxious because Joshua was gone, but they knew just what they should be doing. Each tribe should have been fighting within the boundaries of their respective inheritances till the job of entirely removing the Canaanites was finished. Things never go well for us when we don’t finish a job well begun. We should never fail to pray and seek to know God’s will too. But praying to know God’s will when His Word clearly tells us what we should be doing is not evidence of faith on our part. At some point we need to just get busy and obey. Our obligation in this time is to watch and occupy till Christ returns. Is that what you have been doing since you were saved and baptized?