

Re-Cycling Judges: “Which God?”
Epilogue
9.9.18



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“What is the Bible and how do we read it?”

“How are we to make sense of the really disturbing and confusing parts?”

“What are we to do with Jesus, in light of those really disturbing and confusing parts?”

Okay... trivia time!

After Jesus fed 5,000+ people with two fish and five loaves of bread, how many baskets were left over?

Which wood has been used by Noah to build the ark?

What was Jesus' middle name?

“How would you finish this sentence: ‘But what about _____?’ What questions do you have about the Bible?”

“What have you found to be most challenging in your own attempts to consistently read the Bible?”

Discuss the importance and challenges that are associated with reading an ancient text in our modern context?

“What is it that you believe to be true of God that prevents you from trusting him? Would you be open to re-considering your position in light of Jesus?”

“Where is the place where you would say that your will is running head-on into God's will?”

“Are you yet to arrive at a ‘nevertheless’?”

Teaching Notes...

Discovery | We are a people who are being formed and informed by the biblical narrative and who are developing both a strong sense of identity (who we are) and a deep sense of purpose (why we are) within the Story of a loving and faithful God.

“It is always true to some extent that we make our images of God. It is even truer that our image of God makes us.” Brennan Manning

I realized that when I came to God, I had very little knowledge of him. I had some ‘external witness’ (others; reliable discoveries and historical support) and some strange ‘internal witness’, neither of which I could fully comprehend.

I think the point that Manning makes is one that has been rehearsed by many throughout the years: your relationship with God will never outpace your vision (mental image) of God. When you try to envision God and come up dry and empty, the issue is not with your faith, but with your imagination. Our imaginations have ‘met their match’.

Judges is not just about the cycle of sin and epic failure, but about the relentless love of God which pursues humanity in order to break the cycle so that we might experience a larger-than-life-hope.

“What is the Bible and how do we read it?”

Revelation. Most often, we hear it described as the “*word of God*”. “*Davar*” is the word for *speak* and *word* in the Hebrew. It was a way of saying that what we find in this collection of writings is held to be a reliable record of what God was trying to ‘reveal’ of himself to his creation.

Many times, the text doesn’t answer our questions. It’s not the point of narrative. Not everything is a promise. Not everything in is meant to offer some “life-application”. We don’t need to know Samson’s Enneagram score!

I think we devalue the Bible when we attempt to make it something other than it really is. It’s not a textbook. It’s not a manual. It is messy. It is complicated. It is both disturbing and beautiful.

We would say that it is “inspired” and “authoritative”.

This is “God-language” that we use to express our conviction that God longs to be known, that he has been personally involved in over-seeing the process to ensure that we have reliable access to the proper revelation, and that what he has revealed provides a ‘meaningful grounds for action’.

“Inspired”. The only time the word is used in the Bible is in 2 Timothy 3. It comes from (2) Greek words which mean, “*God... breathing*”. Paul is saying that these writings have a different source, other than merely the human thoughts and opinions of those through which it came. What it couldn’t do was guarantee a proper interpretation.

God was about creating a new people who would live and function in the world with a different paradigm.

As you might imagine, as this God was attempting to reveal himself and invites us to envision a new reality, it would be difficult to immediately and completely abandon the ways in which you had been accustomed to functioning. It would feel risky.

“How are we to make sense of the really disturbing and confusing parts?”

Perhaps we simply reject or ignore the disconcerting records. We keep people in the gospels and attempt to consistently “distract” them from the really messy and complicated parts (“Squirrel!”)

That might settle some inner-tension, but it fails to acknowledge that Jesus consistently affirmed the reliability of the OT (Matthew 21:42; 22:29, 31; 26:54).

My perspective on what is going on usually hinders me from seeing what is going on.

Origen (early Christian theologian) believed that when we are confronted with a biblical narrative that seems “*unworthy of God*”, we should humbly ask that the Spirit help us find deeper meaning in the passage that is worthy of God.

When I see God “*behaving badly*” --- in ways that I think contradicts his nature and character--- I either have to believe that God, himself, is duplicitous, or that there is something about the situation that I simply don’t know or understand. I have to trust what I know of him in order to avoid suspicion or condemnation.

“What are we to do with Jesus, in light of those really disturbing and confusing parts?”

If Jesus is the ultimate expression of God, then we don’t start with the OT narratives and work our way toward him. We start with him and work our way back.

“Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command.” Hebrews 1:1-3

We need to understand that revelation was “unfolding”. It was “progressive”, not in the gradual formation of God’s character, but progressive in our realization... in our ability to receive and comprehend.

“in the past” vs. *“in these last days”*: Hebrews says that our knowledge of God that was being mediated through the prophets offered us *“glimpses”* or *“portions of truth”* (Gr, various ways). It was helpful, but simply wasn’t enough to make an accurate assessment of God.

“The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves.” Hebrews 10:1

Jesus, himself declares that it was all about him! (John 5:39-40). In Luke 24, Jesus tells the God story through the lens of his own life and loving interactions.

John 14:6 *“I am the truth...”*

Gr. ‘truth’--- an unveiling; an uncovering. Jesus pulls back the curtain on God.

The gospels always ask us to re-imagine God in Jesus’ image.

I’m convinced that our presumptions about God had to be met with something so radical--- something so *“foolish”* (1 Corinthians 1) --- that it either evoked a childlike trust or a violent reaction.

Jesus proved scandalous in that he could live so selflessly, so other-centered--- in such deference to others (Philippians 2)--- in a way that never seemed to deplete him, but would allow him to experience the joy of the flowers of the field, the children at play in the courtyard, a good Merlot at the wedding.

His followers found it difficult both to walk with him on the path to the cross, and to celebrate the extravagance of the woman who poured out perfume on his feet (Luke 7)

“Mostly cloudy”.

It’s not just the perennial weather forecast in Seattle, but a condition in which the ancients lived in their understanding of God. In many ways, that condition still persists.

“Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.” 1 Corinthians 13:12

I am convinced that good faith is big enough to welcome our questions and hold our doubts.

I realize that my faith, at present, is much different than the faith of my “developmental” years. Faith in its infancy is naïve and simplistic. That’s where it needs to start (e.g. start with the “Children’s Pictorial Bible”, not Yancey’s, “Where Is God When It Hurts?”) We begin with, *God loves you. You’re not alone. He has a plan for your life*, not Job’s, *“Curse that day for failing to shut my mother’s womb...”* (3:10)

Good faith must always result in “surrender”. The surrender can’t come until the end of a long bout with God.

You can’t honestly pray, *“Nevertheless, your will be done and not mine”* (Luke 22:42), until you have realized places in your life where your will and God’s come into direct conflict.

The ‘mystics’ speak of *“being bold with God”*. It’s like the friend with whom you are able to speak so candidly that it makes everyone else in the room uncomfortable.

“[God] will defend himself only by his patience and his beauty.” Leon Bloy, French novelist

God demonstrates the power of his love--- and his confidence in its ability to capture your heart and win your affection--- by refusing to impose it upon you.