

# “A Few Good Men and Women”

November 2, 2014

## INTRODUCTION & PRAYER

This morning, we'll be focusing on Chapter 8 of *The Story*. It's titled “A Few Good Men & Women.” This chapter is based on the Book of Judges from the Bible's Old Testament.

Albert Einstein's definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” If you were seeking an example of what insanity might look like, you wouldn't need to look any further than the people of Israel in this chapter. Time and time again, they **sin** by rebelling and turning away from God; a foreign army invades and **oppresses** them; God raises up a judge (a leader) to save them; to help them **repent** and be **delivered**. Again & again & again & again...

You'd think that after living through this cycle two or three times, they'd get it. But, no. Not only did they fail to learn from past mistakes, every time they end up oppressed and abandoned, they're shocked! They can't believe that this has happened to them (again).

As we read this chapter, it's so easy to find fault with God's people. But when we look in the mirror and examine our own lives today, this behavior looks pretty familiar. We'll talk more about that.

## REVIEW OF LAST WEEK

Last week, we heard how Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan River and how they captured one city after another beginning with Jericho. What we discovered last week was that there were three things that needed to happen for the people of Israel to conquer the land.

First, they needed to **know that God's promises were sure**. God promised this land to them (through Abraham) 600 years earlier. He promised to be with them as they went into the Promised Land. They needed to be completely confident of that promise.

Secondly, they needed to **remain separate**. God told them to wipe out the land, to annihilate every person living there. While it was bloody and gory and even barbaric, we learned that God did this because the Canaanites had become so wicked that God didn't want the people of Israel to be pulled down into that sin and to stray from their allegiance to Him.

Thirdly, they needed to **choose**. They were to choose which way they would live: Would they would serve the gods of the Canaanites or serve the one and only true God?

The Israelites were to remember God's promises but it didn't happen. They didn't remember that God had brought them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. They didn't remember that God cared for them throughout 40 years of wandering in the desert, giving them food and water and clothing. They didn't remember that God had given the people of Canaan over to them. This was a new generation and they didn't remember. They forgot.

Sometimes spiritual forgetfulness leads to trouble. Even today, God sees us through a serious illness. We prayed and prayed for healing and finally, God grants healing. We're full of gratitude. We say prayers of thankfulness. We to church more often and maybe we're even more financially generous with the church.

But, time moves on and we forget. We're enter a time where everything's good and our need for God isn't so great. We forget the struggles that we were in and we forget that God brought us out of that turmoil and our prayers (if we still do pray) become mechanical and our church attendance slacks off. We forget. And then we even forget that we forgot.

And then, something bad happens - again. Our reaction? God, how could you let this happen? We forget God's promises.

Things change and as Christians, we wonder whether we should remain **in** the world but not **of** the world, or can we just pretty much become one and the same with the world around us? If the rest of the world is doing it, it can't be all bad, can it? Do we really have to remain completely separate from the rest of world?

Remember when Joshua & the people said “We’ll do it. We’ll serve the Lord and so will our households?” That meant that fathers and mothers would teach their children about God. But it stopped happening. Parents just didn’t get around to it and a new generation became focused mostly on what made them happy. Sound familiar?

Today, lots of folks believe that Christianity is only a generation away from extinction. They believe that if the present generation doesn’t teach the next generation about faith, there will be a new generation that arises who has no faith.

A recent USA Today article said that the “Nones” are on the rise. The Nones are those who write the word “none” in the survey box that asks for their religious affiliation. Today, 20% of Americans claim to be a “None.” They have no religious identity. This is a huge cultural shift.

Research proves that this change can be attributed to the failure of parents to share their faith with their children. If mom and dad don’t have a religious faith, why would we expect that their children would? Research says that the majority of young people will only take their faith as seriously as their parents take theirs. When young people grow up with their parents going to church once a month, there’s a strong likelihood that they’ll go to church once a month when they’re adults. If we want our kids to believe in something, we have to show them. Parents must teach their children about Christ. Grandparents have to tell their grandchildren about Jesus.

In the Presbyterian church, when a child is baptized, parents & the church congregation promise to support the child in their faith journey. That’s why we’re so focused on families learning about *The Story* each week. That’s why every single week we make Parent’s Pages available to help parents discuss the week’s lesson with their kids.

Parents and grandparents: Are you using them? If not, start this week. They’re available here at the church and online. One night during dinner, pull out that Parent’s Page; find an age-appropriate question for your child and ask it. Just get a discussion started. You may be really surprised at where the discussion goes...

Anyway, the people of Israel had three things that would allow them to conquer the Promised Land. They needed to remember God's promises, remain separate, and choose to serve the one true God. And they did none of those things! So, a new generation arose that didn't know the Lord and did evil in the sight of the Lord.

However, once again, we'll see this amazing nature of our God. That upper story is all about God bringing His people back into a relationship with Him. We've already seen God do this again and again in our readings. He continues to do it leading right up to Jesus [who is God's ultimate way of bringing the people He loves back to Him].

### **THIS WEEK**

Through the book of Judges, **God raised up Judges** (11 men and 1 woman) to deliver the people out of oppression. We've talked a bit about one of the more famous judges (Samson) earlier. Let's look at 2 others: Deborah and Gideon.

Jeff and I were talking about this week's study and he shared this acronym "SORD" with me as he thought through the Book of Judges and realized how often this played out.

- S = Sin
- O = Oppression
- R = Repentance
- D = Deliverance

Listen for God's Word as it comes from Judges 4: verses 1-4

*"After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help. Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time."*

- The Israelites did evil: that's **Sin**.
- The Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan. That's **Oppression**
- The Israelites cried out to God. That's **Repentance**.
- God raised up Deborah. That's **Deliverance**.

Now, Deborah was unlike the other judges because she was a woman and women just weren't leaders in those days. Women were below second class citizens. For a woman to be leading the people of Israel was extraordinary. God used this woman in a powerful way.

As usual, the Israelites were in trouble. They had turned from the Lord and were sold into the hands of the king of Canaan. Deborah was leading Israel at the time and sent for a general, Barak, to take 10,000 men with him while she lured a Canaanite general named Sisera to follow her into a trap where Barak would cut down the general and his troops.

Barak was reluctant to agree and told Deborah that he'd only do it if she went with him. Deborah agreed to go with Barak but told him that because of his reluctance, the honor of victory would not be Barak's but would go to a woman instead.

The Lord was with the Israelites and they routed the Canaanites. The Canaanite general Sisera fled. Sisera came across a woman named Jael and asked for a place to hide. Jael sent him to her tent and gave him some nice warm milk before Sisera fell asleep.

While Sisera was sleeping, Jael took a tent peg and drove it through Sisera's temple into the ground. When Barak came to Jael's tent and saw Sisera with a tent peg lodged in his temple, Jael told Barak that she killed him and it was Jael, a woman, who received the honor.

Once again, we learn that God can use anyone for His purposes. In that time and society, it was amazing for God to use a few good women (like Jael and Deborah) to do His will.

Let's take a quick look at **Gideon** using the text from Judges 6...

*“Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. . . Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. . . When the Israelites cried to the Lord because of Midian, he sent them a prophet. . .”*

SORD once again: The Israelites **S**inned when they forgot the Lord. God removed His protection and they were **O**ppressed by the Midianites. The people **R**epented and cried out to God, and God sent a **D**eliverer in the form of Gideon.

Now, Gideon was just a normal farmer when an angel of the Lord came to him. He was secretly grinding wheat so that the Midianites couldn't find out. God told Gideon that he would lead the people of Israel against the Midianites.

But Gideon responds that he comes from the weakest of the twelve tribes of Israel and that he's even the smallest person in his family. While Gideon felt inadequate for the task, God assured him, **"I will be with you."**

So, God tells Gideon to lead the people of Israel against the Midianites. Gideon gathers 32,000 men to go against the Midianites - who have over 135,000 men in their army.

God tells Gideon that he's got way too many people and that he should let go of any men who were the least bit afraid. Twenty-two thousand soldiers left leaving only 10,000 men. Still too many for God... He tells Gideon to take the men to the river and to take notice of those who use their hands to drink (rather than drinking directly from the river).

On that day, only 300 Israelites drank their water with their hand. So, with a force of only 300, Gideon went into battle with the Midianites (who had 135,000 men - over a 450 to 1 ratio). Almost reminiscent of Jericho, the Israelites smashed jars, set fires and blew trumpets and the Midianites, in fear and confusion, turned on each other. The Israelites under Gideon were successful.

Of the original Israelite fighting force of 32,000; 22,000 left because they were afraid. Maybe a question for us is "What are we afraid of?" Are we afraid of an upcoming surgery? Are we afraid that we can't afford to retire? Are we afraid we might not be good parents? Are we afraid of doing something courageous for the Lord? Are we afraid of dying? What are we afraid of?

If God's people could route the Midianites (when overmatched at 450 to 1 odds), don't we believe that God could take care of whatever we're afraid of?

Today, we looked at some judges as examples of this SORD cycle that the Israelites were in (sin, oppression, repentance and deliverance). Hard to believe but even before Gideon died, the people of Israel started another SORD cycle (again). The Israelites repeated this cycle again and again. What in world were they thinking? Were they insane?

Today: What in the world are we thinking? Are our lives a little too similar? Where do we land in the SORD cycle?

Are we stuck in the Sin phase? Chasing after the wrong things (again & again); having some mixed up priorities or an addictive personality...

Maybe we're in the Oppression phase where our relationship with God's been affected. Maybe we're destroying relationships with God and the people we love or damaging our own physical, emotional or financial health...

Could we be in the Repentance cycle because we've recognized the sin we were in? Should we come clean with God or will we just continue to experience more oppression?

Maybe it's time for the next cycle: Deliverance. Where out of a broken heart of repentance, we allow God to deliver us.

As we come to a conclusion, I'd like to ask if you ever made a promise to God and then failed to live up to the promise? My guess is that every single one of us has done that. Chapter 8 of *The Story* and The Bible's Book of Judges tells us about people who repeatedly and insanely failed to keep their promises to God.

There's Good News for each of us, this morning. God has a track record when it comes to dealing with people who don't live up to their promises.

God can take a few good (but not perfect) women and men and use them for good OR give them a second, a third or maybe even (in some cases) a zillionth new chance.

When you think that there's no hope for you or that your life might be of little value, remember the Israelites and God's amazing grace. Be thankful for all that we can ultimately become through Christ. Amen.