

JUDGES SERMON SERIES - SPECTACLES

Winter/Spring 2026

The Old Testament book of Judges is a dark and almost dystopian narrative that is part of the Historical Books found in the Scriptures. Like all the books of history, the goal of the work is significantly more than just telling the story of leaders and movements. These books are covenant books, telling the story of God and the relationship with His people Israel. God is continually faithful, His people are not. Judges focuses on about 350 years of history and provides a narrative of a downward spiral away from Jehovah and His blessings. The key verse in the entire book is the very last phrase that declares, "There was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Of course, if we read the book as its supposed to be read, we should immediately know that God is their King, He delivered them from Egypt, gave them the Promised Land as an inheritance, and He keeps rescuing them from themselves and the nations surrounding them. Yet, they keep denying Him, falling into idolatry, and giving themselves to evil and sinful practices, so God hands them over to their enemies. But, they cry out to Him, God raises up deliverers, arms of His justice and love, judges who fight on their behalf and bring them back into relationship with God and thus the blessings of relationship with the One who loves them and made them His.

Judges is a difficult book. If you grew up in church you might have heard names such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. The tendency with so many of the Old Testament leaders is to highlight their positive characteristics and pointing to them as examples to follow. The truth is, that when you actually read these books (or preach through them), you are confronted with a dark and difficult reality. For the most part, these leaders are pretty much awful people with significant character flaws and horrible moments. Not the heroes we thought they were. And, then there are the Israelites, God's chosen people. An honest reading of Judges will make you question why God would ever choose or use them. They continually reject the God who saved them, turn to Canaanite idols, and fall into awful practices that should make us nauseous. The whole book of Judges is the dark story of the downward trajectory from their great victory in conquest of the Promised Land until the first king in Israel, King Saul. Each generation falls into greater evils and spins further away from their relationship with the God who rescued them from slavery and gave them their place. In many ways, Judges is like *The Empire Strikes Back* in the Star Wars saga. The very first movie made, *A New Hope* is a victory tale, as the Resistance (the good guys) stand against Darth Vader and the dark side of the force, ultimately destroying the death star and giving freedom to the galaxy. That movie ends on a huge high note, as does the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. *The Empire Strikes Back* though, shows the rising up of the dark side of the force and even exposes the weaknesses of the good characters. In the end it seems as if evil has won and the good characters are without hope. Similarly, Judges is the dark sequel to Joshua, as the evil of Israel grows in the land. The people of God fall further and further away from God, become more and more like the Canaanites; as a result they forfeit so many of the blessings of their covenant relationship.

So, why would a book like this be in the Bible? Tim Keller provides a helpful answer in his commentary on Judges:

“The answer is an important one—it is the gospel! The book of Judges shows us that the Bible is not a “Book of Virtues”; it is not full of inspirational stories. Why? Because the Bible (unlike the books on which other religions are based) is not about following moral examples. It is about a God of mercy and long-suffering, who continually works in and through us despite our constant resistance to his purposes. Ultimately, there is only one hero in this book, and he’s divine. When we read this part of Scripture as a historical recounting of how God works to rescue his undeserving people through, and out of, the mess their sin brings them into, then it comes alive to us in our heads and hearts, and speaks into our own lives and situations today. Judges is not an easy read. But living in the times we do, it is an essential one.”

The big overarching themes of Judges, and the rest of the Old Testament is straightforward. On one hand, the people are unfaithful, their lives and stories form a continual reminder that humanity needs a savior, a rescuer, a deliverer. On the other hand, God is always faithful, He is true to His promises, He does not give up on His people. Yes, He does give them over to their idols and He disciplines them. But, He also raises up deliverers who become reminders of His ultimate rescue.

Judges as Literature - The Books of History

Judges is an Old Testament book that is in the section Christians have identified as the Books of History. In the Hebrew Bible, these books are called the Former Prophets. These books begin with the book of Joshua and end with the book of Esther. These books do so much more than present a narrative. They are covenant books, revealing the relationship between God and His people. To understand these books we need to begin by thinking about the reason these books exist from a 30,000 foot level.

Simply put, we have to think about how we know anything about anyone. Pause and reflect on this. What is needed to have true knowledge about any person, be it a spouse, a friend, or a celebrity? The answer is that we will need their words and their acts. In other words, the first way we know anything about another person is via their speech, the words they say. You can tell quite a bit about a person from their choice of words, the tone of those words, and how they address certain people in their lives. In St. Louis we get this, it is why the first thing we do when we want to get to know someone is to ask them where they went to high school. That answer can speak volumes, but of course, it is not all there is to know. We learn about someone when they tell us about themselves. Without these words, we cannot really know anything about another person. But words are not sufficient, we also need to watch their actions, especially their actions in the context of relationships. A person who says the right things, but they are awful to their wife and children, or they are cruel to those under their authority, or lie to their bosses, is revealing a disconnect between the words used and the authentic life lived.

The point here is that the way we know anything about any person is by hearing their speech and watching their actions.

Believe it or not, much of the Old Testament is for this very purpose. The goal for our lives is to know God, and by knowing Him, grow to love Him with all that we have and are. But how do we know anything about God? Well, we need to hear what He says, and then examine His actions. While the whole of Scripture is God telling us who He is, the clearest space for this is in the first five books of the Bible, which are called the Torah or the Books of Law. The definitive passage, the one where God says “this is who I am” is in Exodus 34.

Exodus 34:4–7

[4] So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. [5] The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. [6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (ESV)

This is God’s speech about Himself. This God formed a special relationship with a people. It begins with a man named Abraham, God called him to leave his people and follow Jehovah. As Abraham responded in faith and obedience God made a plethora of promises that included a nation of descendants who would be God’s special and chosen people, the blessings of grace, and the guarantee that one day God would give this people the Promised Land. By God’s grace, Abraham miraculously became a family, and that family became a mass of people who end up in slavery in Egypt. It seemed as if God was absent, distant, and not involved. Yet, God remembered His promise and rescued His people from slavery, sending plagues on Egypt and parting the Red Sea to rescue them and bring them to Himself. At Mount Sinai, God formalized the relationship with the descendants of Abraham. Exodus 34 is part of this story. The central promise in the covenant is, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” So, this God who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,” created a loving relationship with a nation of people. Yet, God also told them that He is just, and has to deal with the sin of all people, especially His people. The rest of the Old Testament is the story of the True and Living God and His relationship with His people. The simplest explanation of this relationship is that God is faithful, He will be true to His promises, and He will keep rescuing them. Yet, Israel is repeatedly unfaithful, lacking trust in Jehovah, failing to obey, and continually falling into idolatry.

The books of history pick up the story after the Exodus and the death of Moses, telling the story of about 1,000 years of Israel’s history. These books are not just telling a

story, they are revealing God in the context of His relationship with Israel, His covenant people. They are covenant books. When we read carefully, we discover that the actions of God in relationship perfectly reflect His Words given at Sinai. We see both the justice of God and His continual grace. Trust me, if you and I were God, we would have ditched these people a thousand times, but God does not give up on them. He does hand them over to enemies, and allows them to live in the filth and brokenness they created for themselves. But those moments of failure never define them; they are still descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, and God will accomplish His purpose and will. He is their God, they are His people. So the Historical Books are so important because in them, we see the activity of the True and Living God and we see His true and glorious character on display.

Furthermore, the pages of the Historical Books consistently reveal a need that is not, and cannot, be fulfilled by the nation of Israel. God is faithful, they are not. God provides them a place of worship and a set of sacrifices that atone for their sin. Yet, over and over again we are reminded that the Temple and sacrifices do not honestly cover the people's sin, nor do they authentically change the people. So as we read, we should ask if there is a better sacrifice and a place to meet God that can authentically change us. God provides leaders for His people, deliverers (judges), prophets, priests, and kings. Each of these leaders mediate an aspect of God's character, nature, and love for His people. Yet, all of these leaders end up being broken and insufficient themselves, often failing in epic ways. But the stories are actually written to give shadows of hope for a future Person whom God will raise up. The judges fail, but He will be the ultimate deliverer who will rescue people from their sin and enemies. The priests are self-absorbed and power hungry, but He will be the True and Better Priest who will rightly interpret and personify the Word of God while offering a sufficient sacrifice. The kings exalt themselves and often oppress the people, but He will be the ultimate King of Kings who will bring the Kingdom of God in fullness. While there are myriads of false prophets, He will be a glorious Prophet who not only brings the Word of God, but actually is the full revelation of God. Every story and moment in these historical books reveals the need for this sort of salvation, while pointing to one future Person who will bring God's salvation. The stories are dark and the trajectory of the Old Testament continually proclaims the need for some kind of ultimate rescue from Jehovah. Yet, in unbelievable ways, the stories and the leaders in the narratives create shadowy images that picture the future coming of Jesus that are glorious. Therefore, like all of the other books of the Bible, the books of history are about Jesus and pointing us to the glorious Gospel of Christ as our hope.

Author, Title, Audience, and Setting

As a story, Judges covers the period from the 1300's BC to about 1050 BC. Judges begins with the conquest of Canaan having been accomplished, and ends shortly before the establishment of Israel's kingdom and the first King, Saul. This moment in Israel's history is so important for understanding the events in Judges. The Israelites have just finished the conquest of the Promised Land. The book of Joshua

tells the story of a series of military campaigns and miracles as God gives them the very land He promised to Abraham. Yet, during this conquest, God was clear that they were to drive the Canaanites (the people in the land) completely out of the land, leaving no remnant in the nation. God does this as a warning knowing where the story will go. God is not concerned that the Canaanites might fight the Hebrews. Rather, God knows that if they remain in the land, the Israelites will be tempted to syncretism, the mixing of the worship of Yahweh while also embracing of Canaanite idols and practices. Sadly, Joshua ends telling us of their partial obedience. They fought the battles, but decided it might be better to leave the Canaanites there so they can use them as slaves instead of driving them out of the Promised Land. The warning given by God in Joshua becomes reality in Judges as future generations mix their spirituality with the sinful worship and practices of the Canaanites.

As with the other historical books, the author of Judges is unidentified and really unknown. Furthermore, the exact time-frame for the writing is unclear. There are some incredible time markers in the book, often pointing out places and monuments that still exist, “to this very day.” So the time of the writing is close enough to the events that these things are still around. In fact, there are some clues in Chapter 1 that the book had already been compiled by the time of King David because we are told the Jebusites “were living in Jerusalem to this day (Judges 1:21).” David captured Jerusalem and made it the city for the Temple and his kingdom. But there is also a reference in the book to the time of exile (Judges 18:30) which will take place hundreds of years later.

Possibly, the best way to view the authorship of this and other history books is that they were written and compiled shortly after the events, but as they were passed on, scribes and key leaders added edits that would help the people of their time interact with the content. The original audience is the nation of Israel to help them understand their relationship with God and need to walk in faithfulness to His covenant. Furthermore, the honesty found in these books would help Jewish people understand the reasons they were not experiencing the full benefits of the promises and blessings of God found in the covenant. So while we are unsure of the human authors, we also know that God divinely inspired every word, and that these books faithfully and truly pass on authentic history and God’s very Word to us.

The name of the book is taken from the title given to the 12 key leaders central to the story of the book (they are called “Judges”).

Who are the Judges

When we think of a judge we probably picture a person in a robe holding a gavel, ruling the guilt or innocence of a criminal or deciding the fate of a civil trial. As we enter the book of Judges, we need to leave this image behind. These judges are not acting as judicial arbitrators; the one exception is Deborah, who is also this type of judge. Rather, these people are deliverers, arms of God’s justice raised up to defeat the enemies of Israel, bring His judgment on them, and rescue God’s people from oppression. They are

not kings, nor are they primarily religious leaders. In fact, many of them are deeply flawed and broken people, a far cry from pictures of virtue and morality. But they are warriors, people who lead the fight (or in some cases do all the fighting) as God chooses to rescue His people and restore them to the place of blessing and freedom as His covenant people. The New Testament (Hebrews 11:32) shows them as people of faith, whom God used greatly for His purposes. Yet, they are not our heroes or models to follow. Rather, the judges are reminders that God is the true deliverer and the stories of these people are to point us to ultimate rescue from the true and better Judge, Jesus Christ, who will ultimately rescue His people from their slavery and oppression to sin, idolatry, and self.

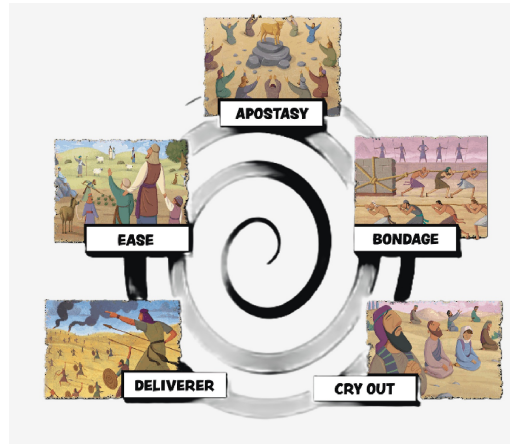
Purpose of Judges

Simply put, Judges tells the story of generations of syncretism, idolatry, apostasy and the rejection of God as their King. The warnings given by God in Joshua become reality in Judges. The key verse that actually defines the entire book is the very last verse in Judges.

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25, ESV)

On one level, the lack of a human king and leader was a problem for the nation. The book prepares the reader for the coming of the last judge, a man named Samuel. He will show up in the next book and be the bridge between the period of the Judges and the launch of the monarchy. God will use Samuel to anoint the first two kings, Saul and David.

Yet, this statement is so much more than what it appears. When reading, “In those days there was no king in Israel,” people who read this as a covenant book should immediately stand up and shout, “Yes there is!!!! God is supposed to be their king!” The statement is not primarily governmental, rather it is deeply theological. Left to themselves Israel rejected the true Kingdom and God as their covenant Monarch. They fell for the same ugly temptation that wrecked Adam and Eve, that they could be their own god, reject any external authority, and determine right and wrong for themselves. We don’t want a King, we want to be king. We don’t want a God, we want to be god. The outcome is a 350 year downward spiral that ends horribly, going through a cycle that is repeated 12 times in the book.



For the series we will describe the spiral with an ABCDE acrostic.

Apostasy - Israel rejects God, embraces the idols and false gods of the nations around them, and fall into awful practices, injustices, and immorality. Rather than representing God to the world around them, specifically the Canaanites, they begin to embrace the idols and sinful practices of Canaan, gradually mixing in the worship of Baal and other deities with the worship of Jehovah. But this always means the ultimate rejection of the True and Living God replacing Him with gods who are worthless and cannot save.

Bondage - As the Israelites reject God while embracing idols, God removes His protective presence and delivers them to the nations around them. Generally, God gives His people over to the very people groups whose idols the Israelites worship and sinful practices they endorse. The result is a season of oppression, harassment, and even enslavement.

Cry Out - From their place of bondage and oppression, the Israelites cry out to God seeking His deliverance. The prompting to cry out comes from the Holy Spirit, as the people remember their God and His love for them. And the God who loves them hears their cry.

Deliverance - Therefore, God raises a deliverer or judge who represents His rescue for their deliverance. The judge either fights their enemies on Israel's behalf or raises up an army from the nation to cast off their oppressor. In all cases the victories won are miraculous, revealing the faithfulness and grace of God as He fights for His people. By the end of each judge's story, the people are back to the place of blessing, rescued from the oppressor and free to worship Jehovah.

Ease - The God of covenant begins to bless His people, keeping His promises, and they have a season of blessing and ease. But they quickly reject Him, begin believing in their own greatness, and start falling back into idolatry and injustice, and so starts the next season of apostasy.

This cycle is on repeat in Judges, the story being retold twelve times. Yet, each time the people fall deeper into syncretism and become more “Canaanite” and less marked by the covenant. So the idolatry and wickedness becomes more profound. And their crying out and repentance grows fainter, so much so that this aspect of the cycle is not even present before the story of Samson. As a result, the character of the judges follows the same descent. All the judges are flawed, yet they become progressively worse. The last two are actually tales of what not to do or be rather than examples of godly leaders. Just read the Samson story. No where will you stop and say, “Man, I want to be a godly person like Samson.”

Therefore, these deliverers are not the heroes. The only hero is God who is faithful and true even though His people deserve a swift destruction. The judges do point us to a deep longing, the need for a True and Better Deliverer who is the righteous Judge and King.

Major Themes in Judges

1. God’s faithfulness to His promises - God gave His people the land He had promised to Abraham. And even though they waste their blessings and use the land to deny Him, God is faithful to the promises He has made in His covenant with them and will not let them go.
2. The depth of human depravity - Like the other history books, Judges does not sugar coat the depth of wickedness and evil in the human experience. As God’s people reject Him as King and choose to do what is right in their own eyes the outcome is awful, yet so very real. Judges looks very much like authentic human history and yesterday’s news feed. The trajectory for the evil in Judges compounds as the story progresses. One of the final judges, Jephthah makes a terrible promise to God; as a result he murders his own daughter in a child sacrifice. Samson is deeply sexually broken and manipulative. And the last two stories in Judges are tales of sexual abuse, rape, theft, greed, murder, exploitation, and so much more. They are really horrible stories; yet, they are so true and real. The Bible doesn’t hide or gloss over human wickedness and evil. Honest readings of Biblical history and human history should put to death the mirage of human progress. If left to ourselves, we do not get better. We may build more technology, but all that does is accelerate greed, lust, hatred, and the pursuit of power. In the end, we may be shocked that these stories are actually in the Bible; yet, they are there to remind us of the depth of human depravity and need for a rescuer.
3. God’s sovereign purpose in spite of sin and idolatry - Their willful disobedience, beginning with the failure to drive out the Canaanites, seems to derail the story of God. Yet, Judges is a page in a grand story being woven together by our Creator and Redeemer. He uses the sin and wickedness of men and women to accomplish His grand redemptive purpose.
4. We need a King - The fact that everyone did what was right in his own eyes is not just

a theme in the story of Judges - it is the grand theme of human history. We are rebellious, self-centered, self-absorbed people who believe that life will be meaningful and happy when and if I get my way. And like the people in Judges, the results are embarrassingly awful. The wreckage of human lives and human history is a verifiable reality. The alternative is God as our King and His Kingdom as our hope and purpose.

5. The danger of syncretism - The apostasy in Judges is never really a full rejecting of God and Israel's place as His people. They want to keep His blessings, but they want to mix their spirituality with that of their neighbors. Judges reminds us that God alone defines who He is, how He is to be worshiped, and what it means for us to live in faith and obedience. He desires Lordship over all of life, not just a few areas. Half-way discipleship and compromise is always unstable and will leave us broken.

6. We need continual spiritual renewal - Judges confronts us with the reality that our lives and those of His people in any context often follows the same spiral. We go through seasons of faith and obedience that is accompanied with blessing. But often we then drift, grow cold, and begin mixing our faith in God with our own desires. Therefore, we continually need the Spirit of God to bring the glory of God and the redemption of Jesus to our eyes and we need to cry out to Him in repentance, faith, and obedience. To get us there, God may allow us to go through dry and difficult seasons. Yet, God never gives up on His people, and with repentance, "Our sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

7. We need a true deliverer - The judges are flawed and often terrible people. Yet, they are the people God chose to use to throw off Israel's oppressors, rescue them from slavery, and bring them back into the place of blessing. These judges prove insufficient to genuinely change the people. The reason is because their true oppressor was never the Midianites, Canaanites, or Philistines. The true oppressor was sin, self, and their idols. We too seek to fill our lives with these things, find ourselves in slavery to our sin, and end up living as broken messes. The deliverers in Judges paint pictures of how God saves using people, but they also show us the need for a better Rescuer.

Sermon Plan and Schedule

Sermon 1, January 12 - *The Storytelling God* (Judges 1:1-2:5)

Judges opens by setting this book in the larger story of Israel's relationship with God. As a book of history, Judges is doing so much more than giving us facts and details about events in history, movements, and leaders. Like all of the other history books, the key to understanding books of history is to see that they are revealing the true and living God in a covenant relationship with a nation of people whom He loved, rescued, redeemed, and brought into a relationship. The history literature are covenant books, highlighting the trajectory of this relationship, which also points us to the goal of the story. He is their God, they are His people. God called a man, that man became a family, and that family became a people living in slavery. God rescued them from slavery and made them a

nation. Now He has given them a place, the Promised Land. Eventually they would become a Kingdom. God did all of this so He could send a single person into history. But along the way, God is gracious and so faithful but the blessed people are unfaithful. So the history books are incredibly messy. We have to remember that just because the Bible reports it, does not necessarily mean that God supports it (like cutting off thumbs and toes). Still, God is telling a great story, and that story pushes us to Jesus as the only hope for unfaithful Israel.

Sermon 2, January 18 - *No Kings* (Judges 21:25, 2:6-23)

Judges is kind of the dark sequel, the *Empire Strikes Back* in the section of Israel's history known as the conquest. The book of Joshua took us through a glorious military campaign with victories on every side that resulted in God's people being given the land He promised Abraham. But they did not fully obey God in the process and as Joshua begins the grand theme becomes visible. Judges ends with a statement that defines the whole book, "In those days there was not king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Of course, we should read this a bit sarcastically, there was a King, God was their King. But they turned to the worship of the idols of the nations surrounding them and as a result, forfeited God's protection. The result is a downward cycle that runs through the whole book. This sermon will introduce the cycle of Apostasy, God giving them over to bondage, the people cry out. God raises a deliverer who rescues them, and they have a season of ease, which then starts them toward the cycle again. The reason they and we live in this cycle begins simply because we forget the blessings of God's rescue and the beauty of having a better King.

Sermon 3, January 25 - *American Idols* (3:1-6)

This text is so intriguing. We are told that God sovereignly left people groups around them to test all that were in Israel. These were people groups that surrounded the Promised Land, all of whom worshiped and sacrificed to other false gods and goddesses. The testing would come in two ways. First, temptation to abandon Jehovah to pursue other gods. Second, hardship coming from these nations as they sought to attack and persecute Israel which would test the people to see if they would trust in and hold on to their God or turn to these nations looking for a different hope. Sadly, the book of Judges shows the utter failure as Israel slipped into deep idolatry. We may think of idolatry as bowing to a little wooden image, but the problem lies much deeper. Actually, the Bible points us to idolatry as the core problem in our humanity and the fountain that produces all of our sin.

Sermon 4, February 1 - *All Rise* (Judges 3:7-31)

What do we think of when picturing a judge? A man or woman in a robe sitting on a bench and dispensing justice for a court? This is not the meaning of a judge in the Biblical book. There was no king, so as people did right in their own eyes they ended up in oppression. As they cried out to God He raised up deliverers, generally in the form of military leaders who became an extension of God's justice both to Israel's oppressors and for the nation in rebellion. He fought their enemies, often in crazy and rather insane

ways, returning the nation to the state of blessing promised under the covenant. But these judges are not heroes. Rather, they are incredibly flawed humans who actually grow worse and worse in character as the nation drifts further away. But they are pictures of our need for rescue from the worst of enemies brought on by idolatry and sin, and of the better Judge who came to bring God's justice for the nations and deliverance for us, His people.

Sermon 5, February 8 - *Nailed it!* (Judges 4:1-24)

These stories are bloody, but we have to remember the context. Israel is a nation living in the middle of a myriad of other people groups, all of whom want to conquer this nation, take their stuff, and make them slaves. While God gives them over to seasons of oppression and hardship because of their idolatry, God's mission for his people at this time in their history is tied to His protection of them as a nation. So God raises three different people, a prophetess, a warrior, and housewife to be His arms of rescue from a terrible king Jabin and his general Sisera. God's mission is different in the New Testament, no longer about defending a nation, now the mission is the Gospel to neighborhoods and the nations. Yet, God is still raising up ordinary men and women to trust Him and be used by God for His glory.

Good Neighbor Sunday - February 15 - *I was a Sojourner* (Matthew 25:31-46)

This sermon will coincide with an emphasis in our service on the Good Neighbor Initiative as we have Rachel Hart from Oasis International sharing about how we can love immigrants and refugees. To help us consider this, we will hear Jesus words about the final judgment and how our response to His voice will always push us to love the "least of these."

Sermon 6, February 22 - *Redemption Songs* (Judges 5:1-31)

This is some song. A song given by Deborah and Barak after God rescued his people from the Canaanites, it retells the story from chapter 4, but put to music. The Bible is filled with music written for and to be sung by the people of God. We have examples of these songs throughout the history books from people like Miriam, Moses, and Hannah. Furthermore an entire book of the Bible contains the songs and prayers used in Hebrew worship, and Psalms is by far the longest book in the Scriptures. Singing redemption songs does so much for us. They lift our hearts in worship and joy, they retell the redemption story, they point us to God as our Rescuer, and they shape our beliefs and understanding of God. Singing is so important for our spiritual formation, and the songs we sing will tell a story and shape our lives.

Sermon 7, March 1 - *Hail, Mighty Warrior, Part 1* (Judges 6:1-40)

When we meet Gideon, he is anything other than a brave and mighty warrior. God had given His people over to their enemies the Midianites as a result of their apostasy. These people were notorious for stealing crops and livestock, so the Hebrews were hiding in caves and mountain dens. From there they cried out to the Lord. First, God sends a prophet with the Word of the Lord to the nation, and then the Angel of the Lord

to a cowering man named Gideon. Yet, God calls Gideon from his hiding place and invites Gideon into His story. The story of Gideon is unique and embedded in the story is a reminder that our God saves and a picture of how His salvation comes to each of us.

Sermon 8, March 8 - *Hail, Mighty Warrior, Part 2* (Judges 7:1-8:3)

The narrative of how God uses Gideon to defeat the Midianites and Amalakites is one of the amazing moments in the Old Testament story. This is the God who promised to fight on behalf of His people, defeating their enemies in glorious ways so that He alone can get the credit. Gideon gathers an army of over 32,000 men to go fight. But this is not God's plan, and through a process of elimination pairs the army down to 500 timid men, a force in no way sufficient to defeat the joined enemies. But the story gets even crazier from there, ending in deliverance for God's people. It is amazing what God will do when those who serve Him do not care who gets the credit. This story confronts us with an amazing truth, that God uses the weak to shame the strong so that no human being may boast in the presence of God (I Corinthians 1:27-29).

Sermon 9, March 15 - *Hail Mighty Warrior, Part 3* (Judges 8:4-35)

The Gideon story began with his weakness, but it ends with him thumping his own chest and believing his own hype. The man whose story begins in cowardice ends with him fighting battles of revenge, oppressing anyone who doesn't fulfill his desires, and crowning himself as ruler. When the people decide he should be king, in an almost satirical way, Gideon reminds the people that God is really their king, and then takes all their gold and resources, almost equating himself with the God who rescued him. The story that begins in promise lands with a thud. This is always the danger of success in life and ministry and a stark reminder of the glorious Gospel virtue of humility.

Sermon 10, March 22 - *Rebellious People, Evil Leaders* (Judges 9:1-12:15)

When the True King is denied, something or someone will claim our allegiance in the place of Jesus. This sermon will cover a huge section of Judges, but the theme of these chapters is how the downward spiral of apostasy in Israel is getting worse and worse. But the change in these stories is the source of the people's oppression. It is one thing when God gives them over to the nations around them in judgment. But when the oppression comes from their own wicked leaders, who both lead the nation in idolatry while also adding to their suffering, the problem is multiplied. One of the sad truths we find in the Biblical storyline is what happens when God's people continue to pursue their idols and God gives them leaders who seem to give them the desires of their hearts; yet, these evil leaders are actually an act of divine judgment. These chapters are stark reminders of the danger of putting our trust in political or religious leaders who promise to give us what we most desire, and our need to turn to Jesus who is our better King. It calls us to look to the type of leaders God gives His church in the New Testament; those who are defined by character and whose message is from the Scriptures.

Sermon 11, March 29 - *Faithful God* (Judges 13:1-24)

The Philistines were ruthless and horrible people. A sea faring people who were the first

to use iron in warfare, they inhabited the coast land on the west side of Israel. They would become the key adversaries of Israel for generations. The unfaithfulness of Israel resulted in God giving them over to the Philistines for 40 years. The Samson story is born from this moment, but there is something missing in chapter 13. The people no longer cry out to God for deliverance, no longer look to Him for rescue even though they are still God's covenant people, descendants of Abraham. They deserve their fate, but how could God show them mercy? Amazingly, God shows up in the way He often does, by showing faithfulness to a couple by giving them a miracle child. This child, Samson, represents the entire problem of Judges. He is the most powerful of the judges, empowered over and over again by the Spirit of God to harass and destroy Israel's evil oppressors while at the same time being a morally bankrupt person. The simple truth of this story is glorious and our hope. Salvation belongs to the Lord, and does not depend on us. The God who made promises will be faithful to the end, even when we are not.

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 5 (TBA)

*Our Easter sermon will be a stand alone focusing on the central message of the cross and resurrection.

Sermon 12, April 12 - *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God* (Judges 14:1-20)

One of the great gifts God gave humanity is the gift of marriage and sex. Sexuality is designed to bring oneness to a man and woman in a covenant relationship and paint a picture of Christ's love for His people. When in the right context, sexuality is actually an act that glorifies God. On the other hand, sex is a terrible god and our sexuality is a powerful substitute. Everywhere false gods are worshiped, they are accompanied by broken and destructive sexual practices that often lead to the horrible objectification and mistreatment of people. Samson steps on the scene and the first thing we discover is that he is a sexually broken person. He desires a woman from the Philistines. The conflict between his desires and the call of God will define the rest of Samson's life and lead to his downfall. We live in a sexually broken culture that now defines identity around sexuality. The call for those who believe is to submit even their sexuality to the purpose and for the glory of God. The Samson story reminds us that God orchestrates the events of our lives in such a way that He even weaves the mess of our brokenness into a beautiful tapestry of redemption.

Sermon 13, April 19 - *The Spirit of the Lord Rushed Upon Him* (Judges 15:1-20)

When reading these stories we have to be careful to focus our attention in the right place. Samson is not the hero, this becomes obvious. He is a flawed person redeemed by Jesus and used mightily for God's purposes. We tend to picture Samson as this muscle bound warrior, something like Andre the Giant, who uses his incredible power to perform feats of strength. But, the story does not attribute Samson's power to his workout performance. Rather, Samson's story begins with the Spirit of the Lord stirring in him (13:25), and on multiple occasions, the coming of the Spirit accompanies power to accomplish God's purpose of defeating and pushing back the Philistines. We can't read the Samson story without remembering that the same Holy Spirit that came on Samson

has indwelt, filled, and empowered us for God's mission today. That mission is no longer about overthrow of a nation, rather it is about the Gospel to our neighbors and the nations.

Sermon 14, April 26 - *The Devastating Cost of Sin* (Judges 16:1-31)

Puritan John Owen warned followers of Jesus to, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." We tend to think that if we are forgiven we can go ahead and do whatever we want. The Samson story is a star reminder that our sinful thoughts and actions always lead to devastation. Samson's sin took him further than he ever thought he would stray, kept him longer than he ever wanted to stay, and cost him more than he wanted to pay. God's warrior ends blind, enslaved, and hopeless. Yet, we are also reminded that this was not the end of his story: God is always a God of second chances. So, from the pit of despair, Samson cries out and discovers that God's grace is sweeter every single day.

Sermon 15, May 3 - *The Upside Down* (Judges 17:1-18:31)

The book of Judges ends with two horrible stories that reveal the distance Israel had fallen by the end of the period of the Judges. The people rescued from slavery and brought into relationship with Yahweh became people so entrenched in their idolatry that they didn't even realize they were worshiping different gods. The story of Micah, his idols, the personal priest, and the Danites is just bizarre - it is the anti-Exodus and story of Joshua. In those stories, God rescues Israel from slavery, forms them as a nation, gives them priests and leaders, and then gives them the Promised Land. This story is laden with so many images from Israel's redemption story, but every image is upside down and opposite God's rescue story, revealing the unraveling. This is always what happens to people who reject God as King and do right in their own eyes. The danger of false worship and spirituality will always lead us to believe we are spiritual and right while actually abandoning everything Christ represents. So we must let our worship be defined by the true character of God and the means of grace He has given us to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. This worship centers on a different King and Priest who will arise from Bethlehem.

Sermon 16, May 10 - *Is there Any Hope* (Judges 18:1-21:25)

The second story from Israel's history during the period of the Judges is about as awful as you can find. The story focuses on a man and his wife seeking a place to stay the night on the way to the Tabernacle. Believing he has found a place of hospitality, the story turns ugly as the men from the city first try to take and rape the man, but instead get a hold of his wife, abuse and rape her to the point of death. His insane response leads to a civil war filled with violence against the tribe of Benjamin. The story just gets worse from there, and at the center is the horrible treatment and abuse of women. The book of Judges concludes with the theme statement, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Israel was supposed to be different because they had a different God. Sadly, their story just mimics the stories told in the world by the unbelieving nations around them. We live in a world filled with abuse, violence, power grabs, and greed. Judges actually ends where human history keeps

landing, leaving us the question, “Is there any hope for a better story?” But Judges also tees up the next book, as God gives King David, who embodies the Kingdom of God, to Israel. David brings the promise of the ultimate King who is the only hope and solution for the horror of the book of Judges. Christ is the King who both executes judgment in righteousness and also redeems broken people from the ultimate enemies of idolatry, sin, and death.

Outline of the Judges (from ESV Study Bible)

Outline - ESV Study Bible

I. The Roots of Israel’s Apostasy (1:1–3:6)

- Prelude to apostasy: incomplete conquests (1:1–2:5)

- Initial battles and the seeds of apostasy (1:1–21)

- Incomplete conquests portending apostasy (1:22–36)

- The angel of the Lord and Israel’s apostasy (2:1–5)

II. The unfolding and consequences of apostasy (2:6–3:6)

- Joshua’s death and the coming apostasy (2:6–10)

- The recurring pattern of Israel’s apostasy, God’s grace, and God’s anger (2:11–23)

- The testing of Israel (3:1–6)

III. The Downward Spiral of Israel’s Apostasy (3:7–16:31)

- Othniel (3:7–11)

- Ehud (3:12–30)

- Shamgar (3:31)

- Deborah (4:1–5:31)

- Victory over the Canaanites (4:1–24)

- Deborah and Barak’s victory song (5:1–31)

- Gideon (6:1–8:35)

- Continuing apostasy (6:1–10)

- Gideon’s call (6:11–40)

- Gideon’s first battle (7:1–8:3)

- Gideon’s second battle (8:4–21)

- Gideon’s apostasy (8:22–28)

- Gideon, father of Abimelech (8:29–32)

- Continuing apostasy (8:33–35)

- Abimelech, apostate “king” (9:1–57)

- Abimelech’s sordid rise (9:1–6)

- Indictment of Abimelech: Jotham’s fable (9:7–21)

- Abimelech’s violent reign and end (9:22–55)

- Final verdict on Abimelech (9:56–57)

- Tola (10:1–2)

Jair (10:3–5)

Jephthah (10:6–12:7)

 Apostasy and distress (10:6–18)

 Introduction to Jephthah (11:1–3)

 Jephthah's commissioning (11:4–11)

 Diplomatic discussions (11:12–28)

 Victory and Jephthah's foolish vow (11:29–40)

 Jephthah's conflict with Ephraim (12:1–7)

Ibzan (12:8–10)

Elon (12:11–12)

Abdon (12:13–15)

Samson (13:1–16:31)

 The birth of Samson (13:1–25)

 Samson and the Philistines, part 1 (14:1–15:20)

 Samson and the Philistines, part 2 (16:1–31)

IV. The Depths of Israel's Apostasy (17:1–21:25)

 Religious corruption (17:1–18:31)

 Religious corruption of a household (17:1–6)

 Religious corruption of a Levite (17:7–13)

 Religious corruption of a tribe (18:1–31)

 Moral and social corruption (19:1–21:24)

 Moral outrage at Gibeah (19:1–30)

 Civil war (20:1–48)

 Chaotic aftermath (21:1–24)

 Final verdict (21:25)