

10/6/19 - Judges 3:7-11 - "Othniel, A Bland Message?"

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[0 : 00] Please join me in a word of prayer as we go into God's word. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for your revelation to us.

And Father, speak to us today. This is a double-edged sword, a word that cuts no matter what direction it is swung. And Father, let us have reverence for your word.

And let your word, first of all, come alive in this church. Father, teach us. Help us with your text to see what you've communicated through the centuries to all people.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read Judges 3, verse 7 through 11.

Verse 7 says, And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushon Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia.

[1 : 11] And the people of Israel served Cushon Rishathamian eight years. But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel who saved them, Othniel, the son of Kenez, Caleb's younger brother.

The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord gave Cushon Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand.

And his hand prevailed over Cushon Rishatham. So the land had rest 40 years. Then Othniel, the son of Kenez, died. While the Bible is known as the special revelation of God, there's a storyline with many twists and turns, but that which lay underneath the surface is the constant and consistent mercy and grace of God throughout the centuries.

Specifically within this book's special revelation of God, it is also a revelation of retribution. This is a pure punishment, unmitigated by grace.

It's absolute, and it is sure. Remember, his retribution is focused on those outside of his covenants. Remember Ephesians 2.12, which says, Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[2 : 51] The retribution for those outside the covenant of God is a final retribution, and this will result in eternity in hell.

And we are in a story of that type of retribution, but also discipline in judges. The two parties we are speaking about today are the Canaanites and the Israelites.

The Canaanites were under this retribution, while the Israelites were under discipline. So let's see how their discipline begins to unfold starting in verse 7, as we read Judges 3, 7 through 11.

And we study this a little bit more in depth. And as we just read, we can understand that this is a very plain Jane sort of text. There's not too many plot twists in everything.

It seems fairly bland. But could that be intentional, church? In point 1, we see the discipline of the Lord in verse 7.

[3 : 55] And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord, their God, and served the Baals and the Asherah. As the cycle swings back around, we find ourselves at the point where the overview of the Judges period began, with a common refrain, which we studied last week, back in Judges 2, verse 11.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals. We must remember that this is a deliberate rebellion. This is the theme of which we'll carry through the body of this entire book, called Judges, from chapters 3 through chapter 16.

And this refrain is a precursor of that downward spiral of the Canaanization of Israel. Remember the essence of their deliberate rebellion, too.

Canaanite worship was very imitative. And Israel finds themselves slaves of their own desire. It completely altered their lifestyle and their longings.

But it isn't until they are under oppression that they are finally brought back into the reality in the midst of their sinful yearnings.

[5 : 11] What this is called is apostasy. It's the willful falling away from, or rebellion against Yahweh. Verse 8 continues, Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushon Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia.

And the people of Israel served Cushon Rishatham eight years. God's covenant with Israel stood. And his steadfast grace was over this nation again and again, which drew the nation back, which was on the brink of complete destruction.

Discipline. We meet in this verse the agent of God's discipline to this rebellious nation. We meet a terrible tyrant, Cushon Rishatham.

However, we don't know much about him except his nationality. You know, the naming babies is always sometimes a fun time in marriage.

You know, just pondering. What we're going to name our children. It's usually the most contentious time in marriage, I think, other than possibly figuring out where we're going to eat.

[6 : 33] Because we just had that problem last night. But naming babies is often one of the most contentious times. It's an interesting time.

Because you're holding the baby. When you're first holding the baby, you name it. And you're trying to pick intentional names. Some of us, sometimes, like old ancestors who, you know, passed away, you want to name them and keep the name alive and in the family.

But sometimes people look at the meaning of the name. And so they're holding their baby and they're just like hoping the best, you know, that this name, the name of this, the meaning of this name will actually be carried out through this baby's life.

This is actually probably not the case for Cushon. What we know about Cushon is that in his name, Cushon, Cushon Rishatham actually means doubly wicked.

So I highly doubt his parents, you know, upon figuring out their name, is thinking like, oh, this little child, beautiful, I will call him doubly wicked. Fly, you know, from the nest.

[7 : 42] And obviously this wasn't his real name because obviously in that parental debacle of naming children, I highly doubt that his parents would have done that to this poor, cute baby when they received Cushon.

But obviously this was his motto. This was his nickname. This was his reputation. He was a very evil Canaanite king.

And we can only imagine what his victims suffered under his oppressive hand. And while we can only imagine the wickedness that came from him, there is no information given.

So church, maybe that is the point. Maybe the mention of Cushon is not to have our attention focused on the instrument of God's discipline, but rather the fact that God disciplines.

Church, the Israelites were quite liberated in doing wrong. Sin obviously seemed fun. Sin seemed fulfilling. It was on demand.

[8 : 44] Sin seemed comforting. Sin seemed comforting. We live in an on-demand culture. We can turn on Netflix and pop anything that we want on at any moment, any given moment. We can, if you want to, search for inappropriate pictures on their phone, a couple clicks and a tap, and you got it.

On-demand sin. Israelites were quite liberated in doing wrong. God handles Israel Israel, just as the prodigal son, allows them to learn the hard way.

The prodigal son, think about it, the motivation for heading out from the father's house to a far country was due to the exciting new opportunities for pleasure and fulfillment. But obviously, trouble was lurking around the corner come sooner or later.

The gods which the prodigal son chased after were over-promised and they under-delivered. And this drew him back in repentance to his father.

His sin surely found him out and the sin of the Israelites surely found them out. And church, the same is for you. Your sin will eventually find you out as well.

[9 : 57] It reminds me of an old tale of the man who committed a crime. He secretly placed himself onto a railroad train and hiding in one of the cars, he swiftly was taken away from where he thought

he left his sin.

As the train increased in speed, you can imagine the kind of comfort that he had. Oh, the train's getting faster. I'm leaving all that behind. We're done. However, there's something moving quite faster, traveling much faster, namely the message along the telephone lines.

Upon arriving at a distant destination, he instantly was met by two officers who had been long awaiting his arrival. So God often meets startled sinners who have been vainly trying to escape his notice and his discipline.

What we see in verse 8 is God using discipline to his people. Ultimately, God allowing them to make a mistake to teach them. Their disobedience did not end in reciprocated abandonment and destruction of a nation.

What grace is that? As we go into point 2, we see the compassion of the Lord in verse 9. It says, but when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord.

[11 : 24] I'm just going to stop there. This week, I took a moment to look at the response of Israel under a microscope and studied this in great lengths because at face value, it may seem that Israel was doing the right thing, that they were crying out to the Lord.

They were repenting finally. However, in studying this, what is being communicated is slightly different than repentance. The usage of crying out here in this passage actually means crying for help, not crying in repentance.

But they were under deep distress because some of the most unbearable circumstances they would ever experience in this life, this nation of God was being crushed.

They were being beaten, used, and abused all through the provision of God's divine discipline. The truth is, Israel shows no real signs of repentance.

This also takes the attention off of them and places it back on God because their response really wasn't significant. Just like the mention of Kushan.

[12 : 45] Remember, this story is bland. Maybe that also is the point here, not to direct our attention to those crying out, but direct our attention to the one whom they cry to. Remember last week in chapter 2, verse 18, God's deliverance is based only upon His compassion, which is triggered by what?

Their groaning. God's deliverance is revealed on the basis of who God is and what He has planned for His people. His deliverance is not contingent upon who Israel was or what they have done or what they have not done.

This is amazing grace, right? to such vile people. God gives them the complete opposite of what they deserve.

So God responds to the cries of Israel and we now meet Othniel, the method of deliverance to reveal to them who God is and what God has done for His ancestors to help them remember.

This point 3 speaks about the provision of the Lord. Verse 9 continues, And the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel who saved them, Othniel, the son of Kenes, Caleb's younger brother.

[14 : 12] The Spirit of the Lord was upon him and he judged Israel. He went out to war and the Lord gave Cushon Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand and his hand prevailed over Cushon Rishatham.

We meet a man named Othniel. His name literally means God is my strength. We also mentioned him two weeks earlier in chapter 1.

He was the husband of Oksa and he was quite a courageous man who fought with Judah. He kept the covenant of the Lord and did not intermarry with the Canaanites.

He was a man who you would have expected to enter into retirement after the great dowry he received in chapter 1 after his marriage and receiving the land and the springs and the Negev mentioned in chapter 1 verse 15.

But he didn't. Othniel remained committed to the battle and continued to fight with the nation against the Canaanites. Not only was he the first judge we read about but more importantly he is a model judge in this passage because the author is trying to communicate something to us through this brief account of Othniel.

[15 : 24] There's almost like an intentional blandness. Isn't this just lacking spazz? We see this such stripped down account of Israel being mightily saved through Othniel.

You know you imagine the book of Judges you know we're going through all these defeats man they're taking numbers taking names and man they're destroying they're conquering these judges are mighty. But we see a very stripped down account of Israel being saved through Othniel. It's somewhat bland. You know Bethany listens to a lot of like English baking shows and whatever and you know they often evaluate food and they say you know this food is bland.

So when I was going through this I'm like this text is bland. But I'm being obedient to reading his words and trying to communicate and figure out what the author is trying to communicate.

Hopefully we accomplish that because it is actually not quite bland but it is at surface level it lacks color it lacks texture and it lacks taste. Why did the author bring about the great mighty defeats and the storyline which we'll get into in the judges to follow?

[16:37] Where did the battle take place? What size were the enemy's army? What Israelite tribes took part? What tactics were used? What did God intervene to turn the tables against the enemy?

Church we simply do not know which may be the point. This passage is illustrating for us clearly without any distractions judgship.

Something important is being communicated and it does not rest in a vivid narrative to keep you awake this morning. It is likely that we have this first episode in such a stripped down style precisely so that we can see clearly what is most essential the activity of Yahweh.

If we're honest sometimes the storyline can distract us from seeing God and we see the judge instead. The author is making us see God clearly. Judgship is about God not the judge isn't it?

Othniel's success had very little to do with his own strength as we read. It says the spirit of the Lord came upon him. This is because of his need for the Lord's intervention to bring the victory.

[17:59] The spirit of the Lord came upon him. Let's talk about that for a minute because there's a difference between our understanding today and what it meant back for that day. This was an idiom which doesn't necessarily reflect spiritual regeneration but it signifies a special intervention of the Lord's power and authority granted to the judge.

This intervention is temporary to empower the judge and not something to be understood in our New Testament understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. Today through the accomplishment of Jesus Christ the ministry of the Holy Spirit has great effects on moral character new identity and new nature through the inner regeneration which occurs at the moment you place your faith in Christ.

You can read about this in Romans chapter 10 verse 13 or verse 9 through 13. Today the Holy Spirit is not something that comes and it goes that God sends and then he withdraws.

He's a person who dwells within God's people and is consistently ministering to God's people. We do not necessarily have to invite the Holy Spirit in.

We don't need to send him off because the truth about it is that he often steps on our toes if we're honest. He convicts us.

[19:24] He guides us and he leads us. He is ever present and never changing and always constant among his people. The Holy Spirit works within all his church.

And despite popular Christian pragmatism, it does not need cameras rolling to work. It doesn't need monetary donations to work. He is always there and works just as effectively as he does between two ordinary people in a living room all by themselves just as he does on stage through a pastor. friends, our concern must be the outflowing of the Holy Spirit not the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We tend to idolize another outpouring as if there's something missing that wasn't fulfilled in Acts 2. But the concern of the church must be the outflowing of that which God has effectively outpoured to us long ago.

The fulfilled prophecy that we read about. Far from a distant magical fairy, the spirit within his church is a caged lion.

[20:36] And guess who holds the key to that cage? It's not us. For Othniel, God's presence and his intervention was spontaneous and determined by God alone.

But through progressive revelation and the accomplishments of Christ, there is quite a difference upon how he intervenes for us today. The Holy Spirit is here dwelling among his people whether you like it or not, whether you acknowledge it or not, whether you aren't praying for an outpouring or whether you are praying for an outpouring.

His spirit is here. He'll always be here and what a great constant comfort to us today. As we come to the end of the passage, we see the victory of which the Lord accomplished for his people through

empowering Othniel.

Let's read in point four, the deliverance of the Lord. Verse 11 says, And the land had rest forty years, then Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died.

The salvation achieved through Othniel, issues and rest for Israel, the calm after the storm. quite a sigh of relief.

[21 : 54] Well, at least until the cycle swings back around after his death, which we'll get into next week. This rest is solely a gift. It was by no means an achievement.

It came about because God gave the victory. Obviously, we already spoke about this earlier today, but how important and fundamental it is to remember in the midst of our self-centered tendencies. This is often exposed when we fulfill our call, when we're serving the Lord diligently. Sometimes we can fall victim to taking credit for what God is doing.

And even reading the Bible, we kind of caricature ourselves into the text. But friends, the Bible isn't about us. Not any more than it's about the judges.

It's not about the judges, it's not about the kings, it's not about the prophets, it's not about the apostles, or Israel. It is all a forward progression which balances upon the work of Jesus Christ alone.

[23 : 01] The Old Testament pointed forward to this work and the New Testament church points back to this work. It's all contingent upon that hinge of the work that Christ did.

All points to Christ. It is not about us. When we discover that the Bible is not about us, there is no swifter extinguishment of pride in our lives than that reality.

It is God who is at the center of the storyline of the Bible and also within our lives. All we are is because of who He is. The deliverance that Israel received was a gift, not an achievement.

not just for their deliverance but also a gift for compassion, a gift of provision too. The rest is for their enjoyment and how generous a gift from God.

Compare the four years of rest with the number of years under oppression. The rest was five times as long. As we come to a close, why is this story stripped down so plainly?

[24 : 07] to help us see God's activity in Israel's life. Through His discipline, through His provision, through His deliverance, it is all because of Him and motivated by His grace.

One word can summarize this. Grace. How great and merciful our God is. The activity of God we see occurring through the stripped down account of Othniel is the precise foreshadow of His ultimate plan all along, Jesus Christ.

For those in Christ there is a rest which was accomplished by a greater Othniel, Jesus Christ, a rest that was promised and has been secured since the foundation of the world and expanded into eternal rest.

We have entered now by faith alone and will experience eternally in heaven. Beyond Othniel is the progression of the storyline of God's perseverance with His people in judgment and mercy, which is the climax which has been revealed, the man who hung on a cross, which was the greatest display of the judgment and mercy of God.

God is the work that Christ accomplished upon the cross. It's the same gift of God's intervention and by no means is anything of our achievement at all.

[25 : 42] The rest accomplished through Othniel is a snapshot of the rest God would soon accomplish through Christ, which extends to those who believe in Him. For those of you who are in Christ, He is now the perfecter of our faith.

He is our Savior and judge of us all. Our lives are the activity of Yahweh. The Israelites' sin had found them out, which resulted in quite a drastic intervention of discipline to wake them up.

So the question for you today, church, is what is it going to take to wake us up at times? So everyone gathered in this room, single, married, male, female, your sins will find you out.

I mean, thank God Israel cried out, though. At least they knew Kushan couldn't help them. But why even get to that point of crying out?

It is less damaging by confessing and repenting than bearing the experience of God unmasking you and entering into His disciplinary process. What is it going to take to wake you up?

[26 : 53] And for those who are not in Christ, what are you chasing after? What gods are you worshiping in your life, which is causing disturbance in your life?

Maybe to you, Christ is actually not central. What are you waiting for? Be encouraged by Acts 17, starting in verse 30.

the times of ignorance overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, and this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.

There is no rest apart from God, only restlessness. There may be crying out in distress, but no one will hear you at a certain day. Do not waste your life another day without turning your life over to Christ.

What would hold you back? There is great assurance and eternal rest that God of the universe will give to you through repenting and coming to Him today. A rest which turns our hostility towards God and makes peace with Him.

[28 : 06] Turn to Jesus and give your sin to Him and receive His grace. And what wonderful gift that is. Enter into His rest and turn to Christ today.

Your story is not over. May all our sins be found today and covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.