

The Parables

Parable of the Trees, January 10, 2016

Judges 9

Jeremy and Danielle Report.

I've chosen these first two parables to start out the new year:

- Last week: It's all about the wine: Jesus is all – everything else is secondary
 - No better way to kick off the new year than to acknowledge King Jesus
- This week, we look at the first parable recorded in the Bible.
 - Judges 9, The Parable of the Trees
 - The main moral of the parable is that God is King.
 - The second moral of the parable has to do with the uniquely created purpose God has given to each and every part of His creation.
 - I'm a purpose freak.
 - I beat the drum of unique purposes because the Bible beats the drum of unique purposes.
 - What better time to consider your intended, created purpose than when you're starting a new year?

Let's pray, and get to it.

(next) Question to start us off:

- **Who was the first King of Israel?**

Context:

- Israel – God's people – have been settled now for several generations
- Continuing somewhat with the tradition of the judges Moses ordered during the exodus, Israel had 15 official judges for about a 250 year period before the rise of King Saul.
- Samuel is the last judge.
- Gideon was the 5th.
- Gideon was the man God used to defeat the Midianites with just 300 men
 - Why just 300 men?
 - There were 33,000 who wanted to fight, but God gave instructions to Gideon to dwindle the men down so He – God – would receive the glory for delivering his people in war.
 - You see, Judges is famous for a few phrases, one being:
 - And Israel had peace for 40 years...
 - A phrase used at the end of EVERY story in which God was given glory by the Israelites for saving them from destruction.
 - But inevitably, after 40 years, the people would turn back to their own strength and wisdom, and try to steal the credit from the Lord for their success.
 - With Gideon, God had him dwindle the army down to 300 men (against 120,000) so that there would be NO DOUBT about God doing the work.
 - Sure enough, not one of the 300 perished in the battle. The opposing army got confused and turned on themselves and wiped themselves out. It's a great story!

- However, what was the first thing the Israelites did when Gideon returned with the 300 men?
 - Jdg 8:22 "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian."
- But Gideon replied:
 - Jdg 8:23 "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you."
- Fast-forward ten verses:
 - Gideon lived a long life, and is now dead.
 - And immediately upon his death, Judges 8:33-34 says
 - "... the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. And the people of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side..."
 - Gideon had 70 sons, many wives and concubines.
 - Whenever I mention wives/concubines, some hearers get sidetracked in their minds...
 - So I try to keep them focused with me by saying this:
 - God never condoned the ancient Israelite tradition of judges and kings having multiple wives and concubines.
 - IOW, while many had them, God is not ONCE happy with it.
 - It was part of the evil that exists in man – and one of the major reasons why God never wanted Israel to have a king: Man's pride and lust for power always ended badly.
 - So if you're already off on your squirrel path about why it was "ok" for multiple wives, come on back!
 - One of his 70 sons was Abimelech, whose mother was one of Gideon's concubines.
 - Abimelech wanted to be king, and knew he had the people's strength to make it happen, because he was a son of their most recent war hero.
 - So he conspired with his mother to kill all 69 of Gideon's sons, with the help of hired men.
 - However, Gideon's youngest son, Jotham, hid himself
 - After 69 were killed, Jotham was told of it, and he appeared atop Mount Gerizim – a mountain still famous today for the acoustics – and from there tells the very first parable recorded in scripture:

Judges 9:7-15

- "Listen to me... that God may listen to you.
- Jdg 9:8 The trees once went out to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.'
- Jdg 9:9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my abundance, by which God (elohim) and men are honored, and go hold sway over the trees?'
- Jdg 9:10 And the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us.'
- Jdg 9:11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit and go hold sway over the trees?'
- Jdg 9:12 And the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us.'
- Jdg 9:13 But the vine said to them, 'Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men and go hold sway over the trees?'

- **Jdg 9:14 Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us.'**
- **Jdg 9:15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.'**

This is an olive tree

This is a fig tree

This is a vine

This is a bramble

Abimelech – clearly the Bramble in this parable – reigned as king over Israel for 3 years.

- He died at the hands of the very men who encouraged him and helped him become king.
- In fact, he was killed by a woman dropping a stone from the top of a wall. The stone crushed his skull but didn't immediately kill him, so he had the soldier next to him kill him so it wouldn't be said that a woman killed him.
 - You gotta read Judges! It's better than the movies!

(next) A Simple-to-understand parable on the surface:

- The trees represent people
- The Olive tree represented the most respected people
- The Fig tree represented the most well-liked people
- The vine isn't even a tree, but represented the most fun people to be around
- And the bramble represented the most disliked, prickly, most avoided people in the world.
- The parables meaning:
 - **the best of people understand that God has created them for anything but royalty, as HE is the only one suited to be followed.**
 - **Only the lowest, most unwise people would ever *want* to be king – for all the wrong reasons.**
 - **Therefore, recognize God's worldview:**
 - HE is the king, the people are his subjects.
 - There is no hierarchy in God's worldview.
 - There are wise people, certainly, whom God raises up.
 - But there are to be no kings among men, for we already HAVE a king: God Himself.

3 Related Questions:

- **Why did Israel so badly want a king?**
- **Why did God NOT want a man to be king?**
- **What lessons can the church today glean from the parable of the trees?**
 - Note I didn't say "America" or "a country"
 - Many scholars have tried to apply this parable to America
 - That's an unwise comparison and application, as I see it.
 - God's people are no longer defined by physical borders or a specific nation.
 - I love America – don't get me wrong
 - There are plenty of other truths to apply to America that are found in scripture.
 - But this specific parable is about God's people rejecting Him, placing a man in His place.
 - It's really not about a country, or politics, or hierarchies in certain systems.

So 3 questions:

1) Why did Israel so badly want a king?

- Alright, so Israel's SECOND king was... (Saul)
- We read an eerily similar contextual account of how Saul became king in 1 Sam 8:
- **1 Samuel 8:4-8**, "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."
 - **They had rejected God.** IOW, God wasn't cutting it for them.
 - **How could they think this?**
 - Just like you and I do when God seems far off.
 - Or incomprehensible.
 - Or like He's not hearing us.
 - We often go to human beings for answers more than we go to God.
 - We think He's not communicating, because we don't "hear Him" sometimes.
 - We get frustrated.
 - We want answers.
 - So we turn to wise men to show us truth.
 - And we place them on pedestals.
 - Kings without the title.

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2) Why did God NOT want a man to be king?

- **God knew the heart of man.**
 - When sin entered the world, God's heart broke for the state of man.
 - Gen. 6:5 – just before the flood – God looked at the very heart of all men and saw only evil, all the time.
 - Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick..."
 - Thankfully, in Ezekiel 36:26, God says "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."
 - Now, post-Christ and the cross – there is a NEW heart given by grace through faith.
 - But pre-Christ was a different story.
- Continuing in 1 Samuel 8, before the people would appoint Saul as their king... **8:10-18** says:
 - Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who asked him for a king. And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you:
 - He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots.
 - He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties,
 - He will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest,

- and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.
- He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers.
- And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants.
- He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants.
- And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work.
- He will take a tenth of your sheep.
- And you will be his servants.
- And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day."
- **IOW, God says to the people: You will cease to do what I created you to do, and be forced to do what earthly kings demand you to do.**
- And the people said...?
 - "No! But we want a king!"
 - Fascinating.

3) What lessons can the church today glean from the parable of the trees?

- The Olive tree, Fig tree, and Vine all understood why they were created.
 - Each of them said, "Shall I STOP doing what I'm created to do – what God and man LOVE about me – in order to "hold sway" over the rest of the trees?
 - "Hold sway" = wander around, walk up and down
 - **The trees thought of it as a DEMOTION to be king.**

What a beautiful lesson for the Church!

- It's the upside-down kingdom Jesus taught.
- **Striving for position of servanthood, rather than of title.**
- Serving according to your unique purpose of God, not of man – or your own.

Paul addressed this in **1 Cor. 12:14-18**

- "... the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, (I'm not important). And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, (I'm not important). If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."

Conclusions:

- **1) God – in Christ is King**
 - Not the pastor, not the popular TV guys, not the wisest men you know
 - Should you listen? Heed their teaching? Take what they say/do seriously? Absolutely.
 - But God's economy is that HE is King – and ALL are His servants.
 - Know the difference.
- **2) Know what the trees know:**
 - **KNOW your purpose.**
 - Most longtime believers who still don't yet know their purpose are likely still trying to please their own desires rather than God's.

- IOW, they've made their wants their king.
- They've rejected (so far) God's intended purpose.
- They're fighting His creation in favor of what they wanted His creation to be.
- So if you sit here this morning saying under your breath to me as I preach, "I wish I knew my purpose," I suggest you stop presuming that God is keeping you in the dark, and start serving on lower levels than you currently serve.
 - And I believe the whole counsel of scripture teaches that if you'll do that, God will make His intended purpose crystal clear.
- Each of the trees KNEW their purpose.
- The temptation to function in a way other than their intended purpose wasn't even a fleeting thought.
 - Therefore, like the trees: **SAY NO TO PEOPLE SOMETIMES.**
 - Not in favor of laziness
 - Not in favor of selfishness
 - But in favor of increased productivity as you were purposed!
- **KNOW God loves your purpose.**
 - Each of the trees said that both God and man were blessed through what they produced.
 - Olive tree: "Shall I leave my abundance, by which God and men are honored?"
 - The Vine: "Shall I leave my wine that cheers God and men?"
 - God rejoiced in their joyful supply!
 - He does the same with you!
 - How many here are encouraged to press on when you KNOW someone you love is blessed by what you do?
 - God is BLESSED by who you are, and what you do!
- **KNOW the body of Christ NEEDS your purpose.**
 - YOU are the body of Christ.
 - When individual members of the body try to function outside their purpose, the body suffers:
 - 1Co 12:26 If one member suffers (IOW not functioning properly), all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Know your purpose.

Know God loves what you produce.

Know you are needed in the body.

Homework:

- **Read 1 Samuel 8**

Pray **(Last Slide)**