

The World is Looking Good Again!

Series: If It Feels Good, Do It! (?)

by Ron R. Ritchie

A good friend of mine came by my house the other night. He was very quiet and sober and I knew he wanted to talk to me about a problem he was having. But he backed off, and we talked about a few superficial things. Then he finally said, "I've come here to talk to you about something very serious."

"Ron," he said, "the world is becoming appealing again; it"; drawing me back. Its offer of power and position and money is drawing me, and it's got me to a place where it's consistent--won't let up. I find myself wrestling night and day over it and yet at the same time I'm trying to walk with the Lord. The pressure is becoming unbearable.

"I'm at a crossroads. There's one part of me that wants to cry out, 'I don't care about Christianity or about the Word of God. [don't want to get involved any more in the effort, the discipline and the time. I don't want to care about people. I want to go back to my old life. I just want what I had before I became a Christian. "

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt that tension? The interesting thing is that most of us, if we are quite honest about it, do not want to even make a choice between one road and the other—we want both. We want a life that will allow us both of these life styles on a consistent basis. We want a life where we get all the fruit of the Christian life and none of the fruit of the flesh.

There is a principle running through scripture that goes like this: "God has never given us the power to do, only the power to choose. That which we choose then determines what we do. If we choose the flesh we experience the fruit of the flesh which is; death; if we choose the Spirit we experience the fruit of the Spirit which is life." This whole matter of choosing is our subject this morning--for God does not let us have both. He is not that cruel. He gives us the choice between walking in the Spirit and trusting him or walking in the flesh and trusting ourselves. One produces life; the other produces death.

The Book Of Judges

Perhaps a way to help us see this principle more clearly would be to turn to the Book of Judges. God has given us these Old Testament stories to set before us pictures of who he is and of who we are or what we could be. He sets these stories before us; to instruct us in righteousness (1 Corinthians 10). Let me give you a little background before we get into this book.

God chose Israel to be a witness of his love and mercy to the surrounding nations. His plan included calling out a man named Abraham and promising him a land called Canaan from which the Jewish people would influence these pagan nations. God's promise was not fulfilled for some 400 years, but finally, under the leadership of Moses and then Joshua, the people of Israel were allowed to enter the Promised Land. Joshua then went on, in obedience, to conquer the land, settle it and divide it up between the Twelve Tribes. At the end of his life he called the elders of the tribes together and said (Joshua 24:14-15):

"Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua had a realistic view about life--he knew they could not do both. He knew they could not serve the gods

of the Egyptians across the river, the gods of the Moabites in the wilderness, or the gods of Baal found in Canaan. He knew that it was cut and dried--you either served the Lord or you served the gods of the land. He knew in his spirit that he had to make a choice; he could not have both and be a wise, a godly, righteous man.

I would have loved to have been there at that moment and have seen this great old warrior, victorious in everything that he touched, say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. " I have just recently put that verse on the door of my house. It has taken me a long time to say that. It was not an easy choice, because I too, like my friend, loved the world. In a sense it is always with me, tempting me to come back.

Joshua was smarter than I ever was. He knew you could only choose one God and then dedicate yourself to him--either God, the One who led them all through the wilderness, or those dead idols. Joshua had lived long enough to know the difference. He chose the living and true God, the only God, and he and his family decided that they were going to serve him the rest of their lives. That is the context of the Book of Judges.

Author And Date

The Book covers a period of some 330 years, between 1380 B.C. and 1050 B.C. During that time, because they wanted both worlds, Israel managed to be in trouble with God and the surrounding enemy nations a total of 100 years. (Some authorities think that Samuel, who was a priest and judge of Israel around 1025 B.C., collected all these stories to be used to teach each new generation.)

Will The Real King Please Stand Up?

The spiritual problem during the days of Judges is recorded several times in the Book (17:6),

In those days there was no king in Israel;
every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Isn't that a description of our life before Jesus Christ became King? We developed a life style that was "right in our own eyes." Remember our philosophy, "If it feels good, do it." Or, if you were a little older, "To shine own self be true." Or, "If it's right with you, then it's right. Right?" The whole universe surrounded us and we became "king of the land." Everyone was supposed to serve us, or so we thought. The only problem was that everybody else was "king" too, so we had nothing but battles going on all day long between these kings and kingdoms. You can't have more than one king at a time in the land, yet we had all these other people acting like kings and that was why everybody was so touchy.

I couldn't figure it out for years. I would ask myself, "Why is everybody so touchy?" Because they all thought they were kings! It was very difficult to serve other so-called kings when you thought you were the only king. What a tragedy! Over and over again in this Book you read the words, ". . . there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." There was no direction; there was no philosophy; there was no protection; there was no security, because "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Does that sound like new information in this day and age?

Consequences Of An Empty Throne

And what was the "fruit" of this kind of attitude? The fruit, according to the Book of Judges, came in five ways. First, the land was filled with thieves; second, there was homosexuality; third, there was sexual immorality; fourth, there was idolatry; and finally, there was murder. Anything new? Are there any words there you never heard before? If you read the "San Francisco Chronicle" it is like reading the Book of Judges on a daily basis.

Seven Cycles Of Sin

The Book is going to reveal to us the proneness of man's heart to wander away from God and to depend upon himself. There are seven cycles that repeat themselves in this Book, each complete within itself, and they run like this: (1) Israel would sin in the sight of God; (2) God would send punishment in the form of war and

captivity; (3) Israel would cry out to God; (4) God would call out a judge (a savior or deliverer); (5) Israel would enter a time of peace and rest.

I thought to myself, "That sounds familiar," so I put my name in place of Israel, and it reads like this: Ron would do evil in the sight of God; God would send punishment in the form of captivity and war within his spirit; Ron would cry out to God; God would bring a judge into his life named Jesus Christ; Ron would enter a time of rest and peace.

There are 14 judges mentioned in this Book (13 are men; one is a woman named Deborah). Of the 13 men, 12 are called out by God; one appoints himself, with tragic results.

Political Background

Chapters 1 and 2 break down this way: Chapter 1:1-36 gives us the political background and the mistake that Israel made concerning her enemies. In settling the land, Joshua gave each one of the twelve tribes a portion of it. He defeated 31 kings, but some pockets of resistance remained, so the Israelites were confronted with resistance from the Hittites, the Canaanites and Philistines and others. So when Joshua was about to die, he said, "You have to finish the job. The Lord has led you into the land, but now you must finish the task, settle the land and exterminate our enemies."

After Joshua died, the Lord appeared and said to the nation, "Who is going to go up now and complete the job that Joshua started?" and in chapter 1 we read that ten tribes decided to go against their enemies. Each tribe had to make a choice--to obey God or obey its own will. They each went out to fight the Canaanites but when they saw that the resistance was very strong they decided to invite the enemy in to live with them. That is like inviting sin into our lives--"a little bit can't hurt that much, can it?" So chapter 1 is a tragic chapter of disobedience, for each tribe decided to live with its enemies and disobey God.

Religious Background

Now, we are going to move into chapter 2: 1-5 of Judges:

Now the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what do this you have done? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' " And it came about when the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the Lord.

The "angel of the Lord" appears. This is not a prophet, because a prophet would say, "Thus saith the Lord." But this is the "angel of the Lord," or Christ incarnate—he appears in the flesh. He appeared earlier in Gilgal, and he will appear to Gideon and also to Samson's family later. He calls the Israelites together to warn them that they are disobeying him.

It is very symbolic that the angel came from Gilgal because that was the place in Canaan where the Israelites landed when they crossed the Jordan. Gilgal was also the place where they set up the Memorial Stones, twelve in the dry river bed and twelve on the bank. When the river rose again the elders asked Joshua, "What are these stones for?" Joshua said, "When your children ask you about these stones you will tell them how God led us into the land on dry ground, and tell them how he prepared us to take on Jericho, and you tell them . . . " and he went on to tell them all that God had done for them. Finally, Gilgal was the place where every male was circumcised. Circumcision means "rolling off," taking the foreskin of the male sex organ and cutting it off, circumcising it as a symbol that their hearts were circumcised. They were going to "cut off" the flesh and live in the Spirit by the power of the living God who took them across the Jordan on dry land. That was what Gilgal meant to the Jewish nation.

Now the angel of the Lord graciously gives an historical review to the Israelites before he rebukes them because he wants them to clearly know why they will be punished. He says, "Look, I need to say something to you, but before I say it I need to review three facts. The first one is that I am the One who brought you out of Egypt. Do you remember that?" (You can hear the chorus, "Yes, we remember that.") "I'm the One who brought the plagues. I'm the One who got you out of Egypt with no war, no loss of life, and in fact, if you remember, you left rich. I'm the One who took you across the Red Sea. I'm the One who took you through 40 years in the wilderness. I'm the One who provided the food, the shelter and the clothing. Don't ever be confused. I'm the One who took you through all of that, and I've placed you in this land now. I've brought you to a place where you have cities you never built; fields that you never plowed are producing fruit and all you have to do is pick it. That is who I am.

"Second, I led you into the land that I swore to your fathers. I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Joseph, to Moses and then to Joshua that I would bring you here. That's who I am." Then third, he says, "I said that I would never break my covenant with you." (In Genesis 17 God said to Abraham, "I will make an everlasting covenant to you, Abraham, and to all of your descendants. I will be your God, and I will demonstrate who I am in the years to come.")

Now he is our God, the God who comes into our life and says, "Look, I took you out of Egypt. I took you out of the world system. You could not get out of it. You were caught up in the world, the flesh and the devil. You were captivated by it. You had no choice--you were a victim of the enemy. You were caught and downtrodden and beaten and blind and deaf. I brought you out of the world, and then I brought you into a land, a land of rest. When you accepted me as your God and your Lord and your Saviour, I gave you rest. The war was over between you and me and between you and yourself. And then I made a covenant with you that I would never forsake you. "

That's true, isn't it? He did say that to us and he sealed us in the Holy Spirit. He said he would never leave us and never forsake us, and he hasn't to this day. He made that covenant with Israel, and he's made a covenant with us, and demonstrated it is his Son, Jesus Christ

The Rebuke

"What did you do?" the Lord asks them. "I told you to make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land, no marriage, no trade, no friendships because these people are marked off by me for death. I don't want you to get involved with them." It's the same with our "flesh," isn't it? The flesh is marked off for death. All these enemies in the land are the flesh and they must be cut off and set aside. We are to make no contract with them and do nothing that will invite them back to our homes. They are to be cut off. Of course this is impossible in our own power, but in the strength of God we are set free to do this.

Now the Lord says, "You shall tear down their altars." These false religions were all around them. False religion is another term for idolatry, and idolatry is anything we place between ourselves and God to which we attribute divine attributes, with the hope that it will produce security, protection, salvation, righteousness or power.

Three Forms Of Punishment

The Lord then rebukes them, "You have not obeyed Me." There are three things that he says to them. One, "I've said this to you before. I said it through Moses and I said it through Joshua. This is the third time I'm going to tell you. Because of your sin I will not drive them (the enemy) out before you anymore." Two, "They shall become as thorns in your sides." Isn't that amazing? They wanted both worlds, but they had no peace.

Did you ever live with a thorn in your side, something that irritates you all the time? Sin has a way of doing just that—all looks well on the outside but underneath your skin is this terrible thorn. I have noticed that in my own life because God is saying, "The enemies that you thought you were going to live at peace with, the enemies that you did not believe needed to be exterminated, are going to become thorns in your life. They are going to be a constant irritation to you. You will have no rest; you will have no peace."

When we play the game, when we say we are Christians here on Sunday and then we go to work on Monday and nobody knows that we're Christians, that's playing both sides, isn't it? That is trying to live in both worlds. I tried that one once. Someone said to me, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a teacher." "Oh, what do you teach?" "Literature," I replied. "What kind of literature?" "Sixteenth century!" I'll never forget that woman's response, "Ah . . . you're a preacher!" No one could have misunderstood Joshua, though, when he said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Now the third thing the Lord said was, "Their gods shall be a snare to you." The word "snare" means a trap with a noose in it which a rabbit runs through and gets caught--and you eat the rabbit. "Their gods shall be a snare to you. Their gods will eat you up, so to speak. They will destroy you as a person."

The worship of the Canaanite gods would lead to the destruction of humanity. Their worshipers had male and female prostitution. They took the first-born babies and threw them into a fire as an act of worship. They were involved in all kinds of sexual immorality, orgies and drunkenness, and their bodies were filled with venereal disease.

A "snare"? That is a mild word, isn't it? Would you want all that as a daily diet? That's what was going to happen to the Israelites. Why? Because they made the mistake of trying to live in both worlds. What a price! But God shows up and says, "No, I won't let you do that. I am going to pull back, and I'm going to let you have what you really want." A friend told me that his roommate said to him last week, "Wouldn't it be neat if you could be a Christian but take a week off and go back into the world and have fun?" But you can't do that. That option isn't open.

So what did the Israelites do? Well, there's some good news. One, they wept. They saw what they'd done. It suddenly became clear and their blindness was removed. They saw how foolish they were. They saw that though the world was appealing it was destroying them. And secondly, they offered sacrifice. They asked God to forgive them. And God did forgive them, and then we are told that that generation "served the Lord." They made a very clear choice--they served God.

Now we are all struggling because the world is very much on top of us. It is everywhere, isn't it? We get an average of 500 messages a day from the advertising media telling us how to live. We are told how to smell good, how to walk right, what kind of clothes to wear, what kind of car to drive, what kind of people to be, what kind of beer to drink. They tell us these things and we start quietly "buying" this philosophy. We start thinking and talking like the world and we don't even realize it.

From Death To Life

In Ephesians 2 we have a reminder of who we were,

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ .

The world has nothing to offer us except death, but the Spirit of God has everything to offer to us—it's called "abundant life." Now we have a choice. We have been given the power to choose, not the power to do, but in our choosing, what we choose determines what we do. If we choose the flesh, if we choose to allow the world with all its philosophy to penetrate our beings, then the world takes over; the flesh takes over and death takes over. If we choose the Spirit, then all that is necessary to live this life takes over in the form of Christ himself, and we say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. "

In my own heart I have come to the place where I can say to you openly and honestly, with the understanding I am in the process of maturing, that I have chosen with my house to serve the Lord. My question to you is,

"Who are you serving?"

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this morning. Lord, we have so much to learn. I must confess that if I had lived in the days of Judges I'm sure that all the appeal that was there would have been just as attractive to me. I pray, Father, that you will take our lives and give us the courage to choose you and teach us that there is no other choice in reality, because the consequences only bring death if we do not choose you. So give us wisdom and give us courage and power to make that choice, to choose you this morning and to make it a clear, definite choice that we will follow you, honor you, trust you, glorify you, love you and spend eternity with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No. 3640
Judges 2:1-5 1
July 2, 1978
First Message
Ron Ritchie

[Back to Index Page](#)

Copyright© 1996 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.