

[believe]

:: judges 1.1-7 ::

So far in our studies of these Old Testament battles we've seen that men of God who are victorious in their lives are men who are disciplined, men who endure, men who are bold, men who are exhaustive and men who are Spirit-filled.

This morning we have a slightly different situation, because though we will find the people of Israel triumphant on the battlefield, the victory is bitter-sweet because their disbelief led to *spiritual* failures.

As 21st century believers, if we want to be men that God uses, if we want to be men that overcome sin and have a dynamic relationship with the Almighty, then we must be men who **believe**.

What you believe is very important, because what you believe will determine your actions. We're not talking about salvation, but instead, as Christians, what we believe about God, His word and His plan for our lives.

In Judges chapter 1 we read this:

Judges 1.1 - After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?"

Now pause.

What we need to keep in mind is that the Children of Israel were *masters* of saying one thing but believing another. They were masters of giving lip-service to God, while their heart denied Him.

And this is a danger that we still face today. The problem of the exodused Israelis and the Pharisees and the Ephesian church was all the same and it is a problem that we encounter still today, that we confess Jesus with our lips but deny Him with our actions. Titus 1.16.

This is such a pervasive problem that even at the end of human history there will be many who come into the presence of Jesus Christ at the judgment and say, "Lord, Lord" and He will be forced to say, 'I did not know you.'

So often have a disconnect between what we know to be true in the Scriptures and what we find actually working out in our own lives. We know the word, we know the promises, but do we believe them?

The people came here and inquired of the Lord. On first glance this seems a good thing. But, what we can't forget is that God had *already* given them directive. He'd already prepared them for this conquest. Joshua had *already* gathered them together and rebuked them for failing to do what they had already been told to do!

And now, Joshua is dead, there is no single ruler in the nation, the tribes have been left to accomplish what God had given them, and we see them coming to the Lord and saying, "Well, what do we do?!?"

Now, as Christians we constantly need teaching. We need to be sitting under the teaching of God's word. All of us need that. But so many problems and questions that we hover around have already been answered for us! We've already received direction on them. Clear, practical direction.

We need teaching. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God, Paul tells Timothy again and again to teach those around him, we're to disciple the believers around us and evangelize the unsaved, the Holy Spirit continually teaches us as we abide in Him. We need teaching.

But if we're camped out on one of these areas or issues that God has addressed to us, we need to act on them. The Christian life may not be easy, but it isn't rocket science.

"I'm having problems in my marriage." Ok. That's a real issue. We're not belittling that. But, God has *told* you what to do in your marriage, He's told you to love your wife like Christ loves the Church. God has *told* you to take up your cross today and follow after Him.

The Israelites did not believe the mandate that God had given them about the conquest of Canaan. That fact is demonstrated in the book of Joshua again and again as they fail to drive out their enemies and as they fail to even *attempt* to drive them out. Joshua had to come and say, "What are you guys doing? It's time to get to work."

After all of this, all the promises and direction and leadership and encouragement and victory that God had given them, and they still weren't buying it. "Lord, what do we do? Who's supposed to go first?"

There is no first! There's the tribes and the land that each tribe was given, that's it. God had given them a calling but for many years they refused to do it. They failed to follow because they did not believe.

Judges 1.2 - The Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold I have given the land into his hand."

What we always want to do is see the character of God on the pages of Scripture. Because despite their utter failure, despite their unbelief, despite our human weakness, God continues with us. He continues to love us and He continues to teach us and He continues to give us opportunity to do the things that He wants us to do.

God is long-suffering and forgiving. So as we see the spiritual failure of the people, don't become discouraged, instead, see the loving-kindness of the Lord and be *encouraged* that you serve a God who is ready to work with you today to accomplish all that He's told you in His word.

Judges 1.3 - And Judah said to Simeon his brother [speaking of tribes here, not individuals], "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him.

What do we find?

They did not believe God's promises, they did not believe God's word.

What was God's word to them?

Joshua 23, God says: "I have cut these people off, I have driven them out before you, they are given into your hand, one of your soldiers will push back a thousand of theirs, I've sent fear into their hearts, I've sent hornets before you to clear the way, I will deliver them to you, but YOU must go and take it."

And they did not believe Him. They went to another tribe for their help, not to their God. And, while helping each other out is not a problem, there is a sense that we should get that this was not Simeon's fight. Bezek was Judah's territory. Bezek was Judah's inheritance. Bezek was Judah's calling, not Simeon's, and, most importantly, *they did not need this worldly assistance when God had already assured them of victory.*

Human beings have a terrible time doing what we're told to do. Whether it's by our parents or our teachers or our governments or our God, we just don't want to do what we're told to do and we need to recognize that in our own lives and fight against it.

God gave them clear leading. He gave them clear direction. He gave them assurance and strength. He did everything for them and still they doubted His legitimacy and accuracy. And so they start scheming and go to their buddies for their support, they make their own battle plan and then they set out against their enemies.

Here's what happened:

Judges 1.4-5 - Then Judah went up and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Now hold on. Doesn't this look like total victory? Doesn't this look like favor from God?

Well it was victory, but was it favor from God?

Can we fail to trust and follow God and still receive His favor? Of course not. Not spiritually speaking. We know that to be true. We think of Moses failing to circumcise his son. We think of David failing to move the Ark of the Covenant in the proper way. We think of Ananias and Sapphira and the Ephesian church and others.

God cares about how you live your life today. He cares about the means just as much as the outcome. He cares about our motives and our methods. And when we fail to do what God has told us to do then we cannot enjoy the relationship with Him that He desires. We become unusable. We become people who must be corrected, sometimes severely.

But we look at this and we see, wow, 10,000 soldiers defeated at Bezek! Isn't that approval from God?

But we have to remember that numbers don't equate favor. Sometimes numbers can be a blessing from God, an increase from God, sometimes numbers mean nothing. Sometimes numbers are a result of sin. Numbers mean nothing.

So why the victory? Why not defeat at Bezek if the people were blowing it so much?

Well, we remember the words that God spoke in Deuteronomy chapter 9:

Deuteronomy 9.4 - [Speaking of the Canaanites to the Israelites] Do not say in your heart, after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land, whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out before you.

Maybe we didn't realize this, but God has a lot going on. He is sovereign and has a purpose and a plan and a will for this earth and each person on it. And He had business to do with the Canaanites. In His grace He had given them 400 years time to repent and turn to Him, they rejected, at which point the judgment that He had warned them about came to consume them.

The people of Israel were God's chosen people, and though they were failing to follow all that He asked them to do, in His grace He granted them victory. In His grace He spared them, despite their disbelief of His power and His promises, despite their half-hearted allegiance.

Should we rely on this grace and live in whatever way pleases ourselves? Well, we know the answer, but if you want a visual and historical lesson on what happens when we *do* live that way, just read the rest of the book of Judges and you discover what happens when we follow God half-heartedly.

God granted a victory at Bezek, He had His own reasons, dealing with the Canaanites and showing long-suffering to the Israelites, but this wasn't a victory they could be too proud of.

Because on top of their disbelief, they went one further in verse 6:

Judges 1.6-7 - Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

The name 'Adoni-Bezek' simply means 'Lord of Bezek.' This was their king, who the Israelites defeated, captured and mutilated.

Not ok. Though God's judgment on the people of Canaan was severe, torture and mutilation was never a part of His plan. In fact, we see right here in these verses that the people had borrowed these methods from the world and were implementing them in their own lives.

You know sometimes I think we get this idea that we're Christians, we belong to the Kingdom of God, and we sorta stop paying attention to how we act, especially in regard to other people. We stop caring about how we talk about other people. We stop caring about how we treat other people.

Especially when it comes to those who are contrary to us, those people outside the Kingdom. We sometimes let this attitude in that "we're righteous, they're not, they deserve no mercy. They deserve whatever I decide to dish out to them. They deserve mutilation.

The way we talk about our enemies matters to God. The way we treat our enemies matters to God. And every one of us needs to humble ourselves before the Lord and let Him examine our lives for malice and hatred and that bloodlust that we get. It may be normal for fallen man, but we are new creations in the Lord. We are to be a people of forgiveness and mercy, not malice and mutilation.

Adoni-Bezek attributes that mutilation to God. First, God didn't do that to him, the people did. What we see there is that God gets blamed for what we do. You're representing God out there with your actions, whether you like it or not. And the way that you live is how the unbelieving world sees God.

So where does this bring us?

In a nutshell, what we find in this passage is that God's people didn't believe in God's promises. They didn't believe in His provision or strength. They didn't believe in His methods.

Instead they did *their version* of what God asked them to do, with their own battle plan, their own timing, and using the world's methods.

This is not how we want to live. But, it **IS** an attitude that we are prone to as human beings. We need to accept that as fact and search it out in our own lives today.

So the questions this morning are threefold.

First: Do you believe that God has given you a mandate?

God has called each and every man in this room to a very specific life that He has been working on since before time began. Do you believe that? Do you believe that God desires to use you and change you? Do you believe that your life, right now, is an important outpost which God wants to use to further the Gospel, bring hope and truth and love to the world and hold back the power of sin?

That is who you are. God has selected you to be a part of His work here on earth. Have you received your calling?

Second: Do you believe that God has given you victory?

Look in the Bible and find the mountains of promises made to you by the Creator. Do you believe them? Do you believe that God is enough to lift you out of struggle, out of sin, out of trial? Do you believe that God's power is available to you right now? Not in the health-and-wealth way, not in the 'we create worlds with our words way,' but in the Biblical way where God says things like, "if My people will humbly pray and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear them and heal their land," and "if you ask anything in My name and I will do it," and "He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also, greater works than these he will do." Do we believe that? This is the life God has presented us with, have we received it in **full** or in **part**?

Finally: Do we believe that the end justifies the means?

God wants your life but He also wants your heart. He doesn't want victory mingled with mutilation. He doesn't want praise mingled with pride. He doesn't want sacrifice mingled with selfishness. God cares about how we're living this life. That's why He's given us His word, His Spirit and men to teach,

that we might live each day in His methods. That we might be separate from the world, not mingled with it.

Men, these are the last days. Our lives are short. The time is drawing close where we will stand before our King and He will look into our lives. We want Him to say, "well done good and faithful servant, enter into My rest." That's what we want. The reward for a life lived in His service.

How do we do it? By believing in God's plan. By believing in God's promises. By believing in the practices that He has set out for us so clearly and so lovingly in the Bible.

Your life matters to God. But, like we always remind ourselves, we choose how we live out this life before the Lord. We choose.

Lets be like Deuteronomy 23 -

Deuteronomy 23.23 - You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

Today let's make sure the heart matches the lips and let's see what God will do with our simple yet meaningful lives.