

THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

JUDGES 1.12-15, 22-26 MAY 4, 2014

If you have a Bible with you or a Bible app or maybe your own personal Old Testament scroll, turn with me to Judges chapter 1. We're taking a break this week from our verse-by-verse study through Matthew, which we will pick back up next Sunday.

Historian James Truslow Adams is credited with popularizing the phrase, "The American dream" in 1931 when he wrote:

"...life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

America has long been known as the land of opportunity, however, times they are a'changin'. A recent study conducted by the World Bank found that the United States is no longer the best place to find opportunity, at least by some standards. In fact, if you were looking to start a new business, America ranks 20th on the list of opportunity, being beaten out by Rwanda, Lithuania and Belarus.

That may be bad news for businesses, but there's some good news for us as Christians and that's that no matter the time or place our God is *always* a God of opportunity. The Bible states emphatically that He is not slack concerning His promises, He is not withholding or forgetful. He is at the ready to reach down from heaven and invade our lives with His power and grace so that He might not only transform us and bless us, but also so that we can become part of His work all over the earth. He is ever at the ready to do this work in us and use us as He watches our steps and ordains our days and goes before us, leading in the way we should follow.

Every day we are presented with heavenly opportunities to allow the Lord to work in us and through us. And we find in the Bible that some of the greatest stories are examples of God's people seizing those opportunities in faith, then winning great victories for the Lord.

We think of David slaying Goliath or Jonathan taking the Philistine garrison. Peter sharing a sermon on the Day of Pentecost or Philip joining himself to a chariot on the desert road. Again and again we see examples of people being filled with God's Spirit, realizing that the situation and circumstances going on around them were more than just day-to-day frivolities, but in fact they understood that they were being given an opportunity by the Lord. And, having taken those opportunities, they were then used to change lives and sometimes whole nations for the cause of Christ.

We have 2 little texts in Judges chapter 1 that each show a person living their regular life and then coming to a moment of opportunity for their lives to be profoundly impacted by God and we get to see what they did and learn what we can do if we want to enjoy the influence and impact of God's will in our lives.

So let's set the scene. God's people were in the Promised Land, most of them were anyway, and there was a lot going on all over. Joshua had won wars in Canaan, dividing the land and leaving it ready for each tribe to fully conquer. When we get to the end of Joshua and the beginning of Judges, we find that Joshua has died and some of the Tribes are busy taking their land, some aren't. Some people are following God and obeying Him, some aren't. Spiritually speaking it's a lot like the landscape today. You have some people who are outside of the family of God. And then inside the Church you have some people who are living as disciples and some who aren't. And, in the end,

each person has the choice Joshua laid out at the end of his life when he said, “Choose this day who *you’re* going to serve, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

The wars had been won and now God’s people were to occupy the land. Devotionally this is exactly where we find ourselves. Sin and death have been defeated, and now while we wait for the return of our King we’re told in the Parable of the 10 Servants that we’re to occupy till He comes.

So, this is the setting and the backdrop for our 2 stories, the first starting in verse 12, where we read:

Judges 1.12-13 - Then Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife.” And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife.

You’ve got to love Caleb. Caleb is an incredible inspiration for us as a faithful servant of God. But he can also serve for us today as a type of God Himself. First of all, he is a champion. No enemy could stand before him. He’s a man of triumph and victory. And we see here that, like God, he is willing and excited to *share* the victory with anyone who wants in. He’s this great warrior who knows that he’s going to conquer his mountain and he sends out a call to his men and says, “Whoever wants a piece of this, come and get it!” God, who has no need of us and owes no debt to us not only saves us and makes us servants, but He makes us His sons and daughters, and even more than that He makes us conquerors with Him, Paul says we are *more* than conquerors thanks to the love of God.

We also find in these verses that, like our God, Caleb is a man of great generosity. He offers his only daughter to any man who would come and attack this city in his territory.

Othniel is the man who rises to the occasion. He would later become the first judge of Israel and was a man who really took hold of this opportunity, but he’s not our first example, Caleb’s daughter is. Look at verse 14.

Exodus 1.14-15 - Now it happened, when she came *to him*, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from *her* donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you wish?” So she said to him, “Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water.” And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

This seems at first to be a somewhat inconsequential story, but remarkably it is given to us twice in the Bible, once here and once in Joshua, which clues us in to the fact that there’s something the Lord wants us to notice about Achsah’s heart and her request.

Obviously every text in the Scriptures is important, but when something is repeated for us, and this story is repeated almost verbatim, God is trying to get our attention. So let’s take a look at what’s going on here.

First of all, it’s clear that Achsah was a woman of passion and boldness. She had some moxie! But we see that she was also content to be at the mercy of her father and submitted to his will.

There’s no rebellion in her. Now, to us the idea of offering your daughter away like this is somewhat old fashioned, certainly it’s not a part of our culture, but even though this was more common in the Old Testament era, Achsah was still a real person with feelings and a head on her shoulders. And she chose to go along with what her father said. She didn’t make demands about her husband or

complain about Caleb's plan. She demonstrates a profound trust in her father throughout this story. She knew he was good and she recognized his position and was content to submit to him.

Putting ourselves in her place and, since Caleb is a type for us this morning of the Lord, the question is: Am I surrendered to the will of God in my life? Am I content with His plan and His direction? First Peter 4 verse 2 tells us that we should no longer live after our own desires, but instead for the will of God. Because, as First John tells us, he that does the will of God abides forever.

So, Achsah is submitted to the will of her father, is given in marriage to Othniel and in her request we discover that she sees her situation as an opportunity for them to do what God wanted them to do.

The Lord had told the people for more than 40 years now that He wanted them to go into the Land, conquer it, occupy it, settle in it and grow there.

She was beginning a new chapter in her life outside of her dad's house and takes this opportunity to obey God and fulfill the commission He had given them.

Caleb had gifted the newlyweds some land and now she comes to ask him for something more, not as a spoiled or entitled princess, but as a servant and a soldier. Notice what she asked for: *water!*

The land they had received was in the Negev and was an arid area. Not exactly Malibu or San Diego, the kinds of places newlyweds *want* to live. It was a desert. But she didn't come to her dad and say, "Hey, bless us with a better town. Put us on the other side of your mountain where stuff is nicer and easier." Instead, she asked for a gift that would enable her to develop the desert field into a productive garden. "Bless me with water so that I can do something with the field you gave me."

From my research it looks like archaeologists believe the closest water would've been a little less than 2 miles from her region and she certainly would've known this. It would've been a lot of hard work to truck water from the springs to her new home, but she said, "That's fine. I'm happy to carry. I'm happy to shoulder the weight, just give me what I need to do what God has asked us to do."

She had a heart like her dad's. Caleb, as one of the 2 faithful spies, was given his pick of the land. And, having scouted out and seen all the territories 40 years before, he came to Joshua and said, "Give me a mountain." He didn't ask for the easiest spot or the place with the least amount of work. He didn't even ask for the beach property. He wanted the mountain with giants and fortified cities. And that same heart is found in his daughter. "Give me water so that I can work this desert into a fertile field."

And Caleb did it. Notice: He didn't just give her one pond or one well, but multiple springs, upper and lower. Our God is not withholding. He is a God of abundant supply and generous grace for His people who seek to please Him and serve Him with their lives.

Psalm 84.11 - For the Lord God *is* a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

When we seek to do what God has asked us to do He will not deny what we require to succeed. In our spiritual lives and in our service to the Lord, the Bible does say that sometimes we have not because we *ask* not. Now, we must ask according to His will and according to His purposes, but when we do the Lord supplies.

We can take a great cue from Achsah about having a heart in line with the Lord, submitted to His will, eager to take opportunities in life to accomplish what He has set before us to do, right where we are. Not thinking that if things were easier or if we were just located somewhere else we'd be able to do it, but seeing the potential right where we're at to cultivate spiritual fruit.

She was a woman of faith and courage, willing to get off her donkey and humbly appeal to her father. Sometimes, we need to get off our own high horses and remember that the best position for us is to submit to the Father and receive what He has for us so that we can grow and serve in the field He's given us.

Now we have another short example about opportunities in this chapter. It's down in verse 22:

Judges 1.22-23 - The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them. So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.)

Luz was an interesting place, historically. God had appeared there. It had been one of the places Abraham lived. It was the site where Jacob had the vision of the ladder reaching to heaven. Jacob renamed it Bethel after that and it seemed to be a place that was significant to the Lord as well. In Genesis chapter 31 the Lord says, "I am the God of Bethel!"

But the other inhabitants of this city never really got on board. Abraham's descendants called it Bethel, but the Canaanites said, "Nah - this is Luz." They would've seen the pillar that Jacob set up or at least been familiar with the stories about God speaking there, but they had no interest in the God of Abraham. And so this city demonstrates the tensions between what is Godly and what is worldly, which is the tension we're constantly finding ourselves in.

Judges 1.24 - And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy."

The Israelites weren't dummies. They had become quite expert at conquest. But they could not find the way into Bethel. And so they approach this man coming out of the city and give him an offer of mercy.

This Luzite is our second example. He is presented with an opportunity, not only to be saved from death, but an opportunity to have his life completely changed by God. Think Rahab and Jericho.

And we should realize that the Lord's opportunities are not meaningless obligations, they are chances to let God change our lives for the better. As a Christian, when the Lord comes to you with an opportunity to receive God's work in your life or be used by Him, what He's offering you is a chance to have some new fruit borne in your heart and be refreshed with Living Water.

If you're *not* a Christian here this morning, this nameless Luzite guy is a great example for you. Because you *are* facing death apart from Christ. You *are* facing destruction. You're going about your life with death at the door. But God in His grace has come to offer you mercy if you are willing to surrender to Him and receive new life in Him. And, like the Luzite, if you want the Lord to save you and give you His abundant life, work in your heart, use you for His purposes, well, you have to grant Him access and let Him in. For all of us, the Lord is knocking and sending out these opportunities.

If you're not a Christian, today is the day of salvation. You have the opportunity to repent and receive the mercy of God. If you *are* a Christian, you have many opportunities as well, to receive what God wants to give you and be used by Him. Remember what happened in Isaiah's vision, the Lord said, "Who will go for Us? Whom shall I send?" And Isaiah responded and answered, "Here am I, send ME!" That's what we're talking about.

Today, tomorrow and until He returns, the Lord approaches you like this Luzite and will present you with opportunities to receive His grace and be a part of His work.

Here's how this fellow responded:

Judges 1.25-26 - So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which *is* its name to this day.

This guy is interesting. On one hand, he clearly believed that the Israelites would indeed conquer the region. And he believed that they would honor their promise to show him mercy. He took the deal, and could've become another Rahab. He could've been joined into the family of God and grafted into the Lord's plan, but after encountering this mercy and grace he decides not to stay with them, but instead to move out of town!

His house was still there. Whatever farm or job he had would still be required I'm guessing. But once the Israelites were in he packs up and heads to Hittite country to build another city called Luz.

Now let's think about this for a minute. This is just *stupid!* Because the Hittites and their lands were on the list for conquest. It's not like he moved out of the reach of the Lord's plan. He thought he was getting away from this God and His people, but he wasn't.

By looking at what he did we can see his motivation. I'm sure he was happy for the mercy he had received, but he had absolutely no interest in becoming one of God's people. He builds a new city (I guess he lived there by himself for a while...) and names it Luz. He just wanted everything back the way it was. He didn't want change. This God who was empowering people to conquer the land, the God who spoke and appeared at Bethel, the God who allowed him to be delivered from death, well, he didn't want any relationship or interaction with this God. Because his heart belonged to the world and to worldly pursuits.

And what's sad is that we can see the potential this guy had. He clearly was a man of strength and means and ability. He built a city! But his heart panted after the things of this world alone.

Pastor and Bible commentator Jon Courson remarks on this fellow:

"This man...built another city...just like [the one] which had been destroyed. The same thing still happens. When people go through hard times, they receive the blessing, the mercy, the forgiveness of God. But then they soon find themselves going back to the old areas, rebuilding the old cities and doing the old things once again.

If the Lord has touched your life, if He has called you into His Kingdom, if He has brought you into His family, when things start getting easier, don't give in to the temptation of saying, 'I don't have to

be as intense anymore. I can sort of kick back. I can go back up to [Hittite country] where I came from and kind of rebuild old ways.' Don't do it!"

God wants to do something with each of us. And every one of us has potential because God is a God who is able. If you're not a Christian, the Lord is very graciously offering you mercy before the coming destruction, but you have to accept it by turning from your sin and believing on Him.

But for those of us who are Christians here today, we find in the Scriptures that we live a life of opportunity. Because God is always working. He is always reaching. He has an inexhaustible supply for His extravagant plan to use you and change you.

We know that God has a plan. We know His desire is to complete what He started in each of our lives. Here's what else we know from His word.

We know that God set His heart on us visits us every morning. Job 7:18.

We know that God's mercies are new every morning. Lamentations 3:23.

We know that the Lord never fails and every morning He brings His justice to light. Zephaniah 3:5.

The Bible declares that God is always ready to reach down and invade our lives, to be our arm and our salvation. To direct and give and use us. He is not slack. He is not forgetful. He's at the ready. Like Caleb in our text, He is a conquerer, excited to share His victory with us and direct our lives and give us what we need to change the world around us right now, right where we're at.

So here are 2 closing thoughts for us this morning.

First, seeing these examples, let's be mindful of what God is doing. We do that by remembering that life is more than earthly things. There is a heavenly perspective to everything that's happening in your life right now. And as we commune with God and let the mind of Christ be in us we will see the opportunities that are presented to us by the Holy Spirit.

Second, when those opportunities come to receive from the Lord or to do new ministry or to obey in some way, let's take them. When we come to an opportunity to do God's will, we must do it, even if it seems difficult.

Thomas Edison once said:

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like hard work."

That can certainly be true in our walk with the Lord. But we can be cheered by the reminder that anything the Lord asks us to do, He will empower us to do it. He will supply the springs of water we need to bear the fruit He desires.

Today is the day that God has made and in our day He will present each of us with opportunities to receive from Him and be a part of His will. The Lord wants to work in your life. He wants to grow you and use you. He made today so that He could do something marvelous with you. We must respond and invite Him in. Trust Him. Follow Him. Be a man or woman of opportunity for the Lord and you will please His heart and receive life more abundantly, being made more complete and satisfied by the grace of God and His mighty power.