

## **ARE YOU ASSURED OF GOD’S LOVE? (Judges 10:1-12:15)**

Last week, someone asked me how many speeding tickets I have gotten. I honestly don’t remember the number, but I was able to tell him that I haven’t gotten a speeding ticket in a long, long time. Knock on wood.

Also, this last week, I read that some time ago the author Max Lucado confessed to being dropped by his insurance company for having one too many speeding tickets plus a minor fender bender that he claims wasn’t his fault. One day he received a letter from his insurance company informing him that he needed to seek coverage elsewhere.

As Max reflected on being told he wasn’t good enough for his insurance company, it occurred to him, “Many people fear receiving such a letter [from God].”

Lucado imagined how a letter sent from the Pearly Gates Underwriting Division might read:

Dear Mr. Smith,

I’m writing in response to this morning’s request for forgiveness. I’m sorry to inform you that you have reached your quota of *sins*. Our records show that, since employing our services, you have erred seven times in the area of greed, and your prayer life is substandard when compared to others of like age and circumstance.

Further review reveals that your understanding of doctrine is in the lower 20 percentile, and you have excessive tendencies to gossip. Because of your sins, you are a high-risk candidate for heaven. You understand that grace has its limits. Jesus sends his regrets and kindest regards and hopes that you will find some other form of coverage.

Have you ever lived in fear that God might pull your coverage because you just don’t measure up? A lack of assurance is a very real thing. Many believers live with the fear that they haven’t done enough, that they don’t know enough, that they aren’t good enough, that God is going to drop them from coverage.

God does not want you to live with that kind of doubt and uncertainty. One of the letters of the NT was written entirely for the purpose of giving believers the assurance they need. Toward the end of 1 John, the last living apostle of Jesus wrote, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” God wants you to know, He wants you to be certain, to be assured of your salvation.

This assurance, however, is not based on us having done enough. It is completely based, rather, on the fact that Jesus has already done everything that was needed for your salvation. It has been said that most religions spell salvation with two letters: D-O. To achieve salvation, you have to do. You have to do this, do that, and do the other. The adherents of such religion live in fear that they have not worked hard enough in doing whatever it is that they are required to do.

Christianity is different. When it spells salvation, it adds two letters to D-O because

the Christian faith teaches salvation is done: D-O-N-E. Jesus has done everything that was needed to secure your salvation. We live in the quiet rest of knowing that our salvation is based on the finished work of Jesus.

Our salvation is also based on one other thing of which we need to assured—God loves us. This morning, I want you to answer this one question: “Are you assured of God’s love?”

In the passage we are going to look at, we will discover that God’s people lacked the assurance that God loved them. Because they did not know God the certainty of God’s love, they were plagued by a host of problems. They could have overcome those problems had they simply been assured of God’s love. From our passage, we will examine four things we can overcome if we are assured of God’s love for us.

Our passage is rather long; so, we will not read it verse-by-verse, but we will be looking at Judges 10-12. As a quick example of God’s love for His people. Look at 10:16. My text says God was “impatient over the misery of Israel.” It doesn’t say He was impatient with them. He very likely was, but the text says He was impatient over their misery. The NASB renders that phrase, “He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.” In other words, it hurt God’s heart that His people were suffering the just but severe consequences of their sin.

As a parent, you know that when your child hurts, you hurt. It is no different with God because God so loves His children. When we truly know that depth of God’s love for us, we will be able to overcome four things.

## **We Will Overcome Our Idolatry**

Look with me at 10:6. The writer of Judges lists seven false gods the people worshiped. The number seven is the number of completion. God’s people had completely gone off the rails. The people had long dabbled in idolatry, but this was idolatry on steroids. They didn’t even pretend to follow the God who had delivered them. They forsook, turned their back, on Him. They failed to appreciate and recognize what God had done for them.

Each week since we began our study of Judges, we have seen how God delivered His people from external threats. Last week, we witnessed how God rescued them from an internal threat caused by one of their own leaders, a bad man named Abimelech.

Chapter 10 opens with two successive leaders who brought stability to the nation. Together, those two men—Tola and Jair—accounted for 55 years of giving to the people a just, well-run society. These men were not military leaders like many of the judges. Instead, they were more like gifted administrators who kept things operating smoothly.

At times, we need fighters who can rally the troops and lead them to victory. At other times, we need capable managers who can keep the country or school or church or business or whatever it might be, solvent and running as it should.

Having good leaders is a blessing from God and should be seen us such. Neither they nor God should be taken for granted.

One of the beautiful hymns of the faith is “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” The chorus of

that hymn reads, “Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!” That hymn is inspired by two verses from the OT. As the name suggests, Lamentations, is a book shrouded with clouds, darkness, and grief. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet laments the judgment his nation is facing because of their unfaithfulness. In the darkness of this book, there is a light that shines forth. Jeremiah proclaims in 3:22-23, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

I happen to have a faithful newspaper lady. Every morning, except Monday, when I open my front door, the Enid News and Eagle is on my front lawn, just waiting for me to pick it up and bring it inside. If it is raining or there is a possibility of rain, the newspaper is wrapped in plastic so that I won't be greeted by a soggy newspaper. My newspaper lady proves her faithfulness every morning. In the last four plus years, I can count on one hand and have a couple of fingers left over the times the newspaper was not there to greet me, and it was because during the night ice or several inches of snow had fallen.

Regardless of rain, sleet, or snow, God proves His faithfulness every morning. He has been doing that every morning since the sun started rising in the east.

If you and I will cultivate eyes that see and hearts that recognize the fresh and daily expressions of God's goodness to us, that will go a long way in keeping us from idolatry.

Whether you know it or not, every person in this room, and every person hearing the sound of my voice struggles with idolatry. You don't worship the same, exact idols that the ancient Israelites did, but you have your own favorite, substitute gods. For some, their favorite hobby is golfing, fishing, television watching, eating. Yes, for some, eating is not a daily necessity but instead a multi-daily hobby. They don't eat to live; they live to eat.

Often, it is a good thing that becomes a god in our lives. It can be your job, your family, your children or grandchildren, your house, your yard, your garden. When a good thing becomes an ultimate thing, it becomes an idol. It is something you cannot imagine living without. It is something you look to in order to bring meaning and satisfaction to your life.

Tim Keller: “The Bible uses three basic metaphors to describe how people related to the idols of their hearts. They *love* idols, *trust* idols, and *obey* idols.” Whatever controls you is your god. What controls you? What keeps you up at night? What makes you angry? What worries you? What makes you feel guilty? The answers to those questions just might point to a possible idol.

Like Gideon, you need to tear that idol down before it destroys you. Look at vv. 7-9.

Why was God so upset? He was upset for same reason you would be if your spouse was unfaithful to you. There is such a thing as godly, righteous jealousy.

Let me turn that around. If you knew that your spouse loves you unconditionally, if you knew that he or she would walk through a wall for you, if you knew that your spouse was completely dedicated to you heart and soul, how tempted would you be to run around on him or her? If you knew your spouse loves you, prays for you, and cherishes you, how likely would it be that you would be unfaithful?

The point I am making is that when we know in our heart and not just our head that

God loves us fiercely, our idols lose their grip on us. When, however, you doubt the strength and depth of God's love for you, you are more likely to fall to the temptation to put your trust in something or someone else.

When we are assured of God's love, there is a second victory we can win.

### **We Will Overcome Our Need to Control**

The Israelites tried to exert control over God. From their history, they had learned that when they cried out to Him, He would send someone to rescue them. In v. 10 the people cry crocodile tears. There is a difference between regret and repentance. It is possible to regret the consequences of sin without actually repenting of the sin that got you where you don't want to be.

God saw through the charade. Look at what He said in vv. 11-14. God was not going to be fooled nor was He going to allow them to make Him out to be a fool by rescuing them when there had been no change of heart. You can change your tune without changing your heart. God knew that was the case with them; so, He said to them, "If you love your false gods so much, why don't you pray to them for rescue?"

God's answer got their attention. The repentance of v. 15 was real because there was alignment between the words they spoke and the action they took. They showed they meant business by putting away, getting rid of their idols.

What I want you to notice is that it was not the repentance that caused God to act on their behalf. The cause of His action was His heart not theirs. Our repentance may be a condition, but it is not the cause of God rescuing us. Dale Davis pointed out, "Our hope does not rest in the sincerity of our repentance but in the intensity of Yahweh's compassion."

When we are not keenly aware of how much God loves us, we have a tendency to try to induce God to act on our behalf. There are times we may try to bargain with God. We promise to do this if God will just do that. Don't attempt to bargain with God. Let God be God. Trust His loving heart. Because He loves you, He will do what is best for you.

In addition to trying to control God, they also sought to control their own future. The leaders got together and said, "We need help. We need a fighter? Who can we get to help mold our troops into a fighting machine?"

A name popped into their minds. Judges 11:1 tells us the name, and in the next couple of verses we learn some important things about this man, Jephthah. Let's look at vv. 1-3.

After allowing Jephthah to be mistreated when he was young, the leaders have the uphill task of trying to convince him to help them now. It is ironic that the situation with Jephthah closely mirrors their relationship with God. In both instances they needed the help of someone they had offended. Both God and Jephthah recognized they were being used, that others were trying to control them. Both made sure the people of Israel were serious.

Let Him work in the lives and hearts of others. He will bring to us those we need, and He will take us to those who could use our help.

In 2006 Carrie Underwood won a Grammy for her 2005 song, "Jesus, Take the

Wheel.” We would do well to pray the prayer found in that song. We need God to save us from the road we are on, and for Him to save us, we have to give Him the wheel and let Him drive.

Here is a third victory that comes from being assured of God’s love for us:

### **We Will Overcome Our Enemies**

Unlike other passages in Judges, in this story we are not given a lengthy battle account. Instead, we are provided a rather anti-climatic summary. Look at 11:32-33. The key portion of that passage are the final words of v. 32, “and the LORD gave them into his hand.” God was the One who made Jephthah victorious over the army of the Ammonites.

We won’t read it now, but I encourage you to read on your own vv. 12-28. We are told that before Jephthah took his troops into battle, he sent messengers to the King of the Ammonites. He wanted to work things out peaceably. That should always be our first goal. Before we send soldiers into harm’s way, let’s see if we can settle this diplomatically.

Jephthah learned that the reason the King of the Ammonites wanted to go to war was because he said the Israelites had taken their land. Jephthah sent messengers back with his answer to this charge. Jephthah gave a reasoned response. In detail, he recounted the history of His people and showed how they were not guilty of the King’s complaint. In addition to his historical argument, Jephthah also included a theological and legal argument for the innocence of his people in regard to this charge.

Jephthah told the truth, but the truth doesn’t always win the argument. Regardless, we need to tell the truth and then fight for the truth if it comes to that. What we must not do is compromise the truth.

Israel fought, and God gave them victory.

While that victory should have been cause for celebration, the joy of the victory did not last long for Jephthah. He made a foolish vow before the battle. Look at vv. 31-32. Let’s be clear what he was vowing to do. He was promising God that he would make a human sacrifice.

In Scripture, God commanded that His people to not ever perform a human sacrifice. That was an abomination to Him. Why would Jephthah even consider doing that? First, he probably did even know that it was wrong. Unlike us, he didn’t have a copy of Scripture. He didn’t go to church and hear a sermon each week.

There is a second reason why Jephthah made that terrible vow. Keller explained, “Jephthah had clearly been deeply de-sensitized to violence by the atrocious cruelty of the pagan cultures around him.” He added, “Because the culture around Jephthah was violent, he let that worldly violence come in and live alongside his other true beliefs.”

The NT warns us against this. Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” I like the way J.B. Phillips paraphrased that passage: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within . . .”

The Church is fighting a battle of worldviews. We have pretty much lost the battle as to which worldview our culture will adopt. Our culture no longer lives by a Christian worldview. The problem is that fewer and fewer Christians live by a Christian worldview. Most Christians have a secular worldview. Since they think like the world, they act like the world.

I have given up on trying to Christianize our culture, but I would sure like to see the Church Christianized. For that to happen, we need a heaven-sent, Spirit empowered revival to sweep through the body of Christ.

What makes this story so tragic is that it was Jephthah's unmarried daughter who came out of the house first to greet her returning father. Amazingly, Jephthah carried out his vow. He did so because he did not view God as a gracious God. Had he understood and been assured of God's great love for both he and his daughter, he would have repented of his foolish vow and spared his daughter.

Of all the chapters in the NT, I think the most powerful is Romans 8. I want you to notice how that chapter begins and ends. We are told in v. 1 that there is no condemnation. The chapter ends in vv. 38-39 that there is no separation from God's love. In v. 37 we are said to be more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

When we are assured of God's love, we are overcomers. We overcome idolatry, our need to control, and all our enemies.

Judges 12 includes one more thing we will overcome.

### **We Will Overcome Our Warring Pride**

We saw a couple of weeks ago that Ephraim got upset when Gideon failed to invite them to battle against the Midianites. It was all a matter of pride. Fortunately, Gideon had the needed people skills to calm them down.

Jephthah lacked those people skills. He was a hardened warrior from the wrong side of the tracks. He wasn't going to coddle anybody. When Ephraim's pride was wounded yet again by not having been called to fight the Ammonites, they threatened to burn down Jephthah's house. They threatened the wrong guy. Look at vv. 4-6.

The tribe of Ephraim was unduly proud but so were the people of Gilead. Their pride caused them to war against one another. Because they were from different people groups and lived in different regions, there were linguistic differences. They spoke the same language, but they had different accents. Since the people of Ephraim couldn't make the *sh* sound, when they tried to say *Shibboleth*, it came out *Sibboleth*.

It is natural to feel some prejudice against those who talk differently, and dress differently, and eat foods that we are different from what we eat. Our pride causes us to think we are superior.

Paul reminds us in Galatians that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, but we are one in Christ Jesus. His love makes us brothers and sisters.

There is a hymn we never sing called "The Love of God," but the last verse of that hymn contains the most beautiful lines of any hymn I know:

Could we with ink the oceans fill  
And were the sky of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the oceans dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole  
Tho stretched from sky to sky.

O God, give us a knowledge and assurance of Your great love for us, and may the certainty of Your love transform us into victors and overcomers.