

WHEN BAD MEN RULE (Judges 9:1-57)

I have a pastor friend who is a few years older than me, and he is much bolder than me. One day a lady came to him after the worship service and said to him, “Pastor, I really liked your sermon, today.”

He looked at her and said bluntly, “I really don’t care if you liked it or not.”

I don’t know what her response was, but when I heard that, I thought, “Ouch! That seems rather harsh.”

The more I have thought about it though, the more I can see the wisdom and truth of his answer. When I prepare a message, I never do so with the goal that you like it. That’s not my aim.

This makes preaching different from many other endeavors. The chef wants you to like the meal he has prepared. The tailor wants you to like the dress or suit she has sewn. The actor wants you to like his performance.

There are other things about which it matters not whether you like it. The physician cares little whether you like the medicine he prescribes. His concern is that it makes you better. It may not matter to the teacher whether you enjoy the subject she is teaching. The teacher wants you to learn whatever is covered not that you like it.

In much the same way, it matters not to me whether you like a particular sermon I preach. Depending on what I say, I want the words I speak to challenge you, or convict you, or comfort you. I want the words I speak make you think, or make you squirm, or make you act. I don’t preach for your enjoyment or entertainment. I preach for your betterment or enlightenment.

Through the years, I have discovered there are certain things about which some church members don’t like me to preach. There are those who don’t like it when I address what the Bible has to say about the matter of giving. They don’t like it for the same reason the rich, young, ruler didn’t like it when Jesus said, “Sell all that you have and give it to the poor.” When we become enamored with our money, we don’t like it when the preacher reminds us that we are to give and give generously.

Some don’t like it when the preacher preaches on the biblical passages that address sexual ethics. They don’t like it because it goes against the grain of a permissive culture, and it goes against the grain of how they are living and the choices they are making.

There is another thing that makes some church members a bit skittish. They don’t like it when the pastor strays into the area of politics. They don’t want the preacher to get too political from the pulpit, whatever that means.

I have come to believe that most pastors, instead of being too political, they are not political enough. Here is why I say that. The Bible teaches that God has created three institutions—the family, the church, and the state. As to the family, we know that marriage is God’s idea. He gave Eve to Adam and told them to be fruitful and multiply. The Bible teaches parents how to raise children and how children are to respond to their parents. People don’t get too bent out of shape when I preach about the family.

The Church was founded by Jesus. He is the Head of the Church, and the Church is

His body in this world. The NT offers clear teaching regarding the nature and work of the Church. I'm not doing my job if I fail to preach about the Church.

God created a third institution—the State. The Bible teaches the responsibilities of civil government and the responsibilities of the individual to the state, but the Bible teaches our allegiance to the state is not absolute. There are limits. Politics can be defined as “the science of governing.” The Bible addresses such things, and for the pulpit to be silent where the Bible speaks makes the man behind the pulpit negligent of his responsibility.

I say all of that to say, if you don't like today's sermon, I don't care. The more important questions are, “Have I spoken truth? What are you going to do about it?”

We come to Judges 9. This chapter breaks new ground. Up until now, the physical threats Israel has faced have been external. They have come from the outside. In Judges 9, Israel now faces an internal threat. It comes from the inside. Specifically, this new threat comes from the son of Gideon. Gideon had 71 sons. Seventy of his sons came from his various wives. This new threat comes from the one son whose mother was not a wife to Gideon. She was a concubine. That meant she did not enjoy the legal status of a wife. She was a mistress who Gideon supported, but because she was not a wife, their son was not assured that he would be an heir to any of his father's property or wealth.

The son was Abimelech. He was not a good man. He was a bad man, but Abimelech was chosen to be a leader, a ruler over his people in Shechem. Today, we are going to look at what happens, “When Bad Men Rule.”

It was Gideon who gave his son the name *Abimelech*. The name means, “My Father is King.” It is interesting that Gideon would give his son such a name. Gideon was never officially recognized as a king. Gideon had the opportunity to become king. Look at 8:22. Gideon refused the offer because he knew God was to be the ruler of His people (v. 23). Although he refused to become King, in many ways he acted like a King. Like a King, he enriched himself. He wore the garments of a King. Like a King, he acquired many wives. And like a King, he exerted both a stabilizing and restraining influence over his people. As long as Gideon was alive, the land enjoyed rest. After his death, however, the people lurched back into Baal worship.

Gideon's death left a power vacuum, and the man whose name was, “My father is King,” wanted to fill that hole. He wanted to become King, a real King, a recognized King. Let's read how he became King (9:1-6).

When Bad Men Rule, We May Be Guilty of Putting Them There

It is obvious that Abimelech did wrong things. He coveted power. He curried favor. He committed fratricide; he killed his half-brothers because they stood in his way. He stopped at nothing to achieve his goal of acquiring power.

The sad thing is that the leaders and the people of Shechem were the ones who made Abimelech King. They were OK with him killing innocent people. They gave him money. They donated to his election campaign. There were no campaign finance laws back then. The money came from the temple treasury of a false god—Baal. With that

infusion of cash, Abimelech hired thugs who helped him eliminate the competition.

Politics, in our day, hasn't changed all that much:

- There are still those who covet positions of high office because they want power and influence.
- They curry favor with the voters by saying, "Hey, I'm one of you." They don't live like us. They don't face the same struggles that we face, but for some reason, many people believe them when they say, "I'm one of you."
- There are those who are willing to finance their campaign because they have something to gain if and when their guy, their candidate wins.
- While most candidates will not stoop to actually killing their opponents, many are quite willing to assassinate the character and murder the reputation of their opponent.
- All the while, we stand by, watch the carnage take place before our very eyes, and do not demand that it stop. It's just fine as long as our guy wins, and if he doesn't, well, better luck 2 years, 4 years, 6 years down the road.

What's much worse is that some candidates, while they don't commit the actual deed, they promote, support, advocate, and defend the very real murder of the innocent. They give it a nice-sounding name, "the right to choose." They say they're defending woman's rights and allowing women to make their own health care decisions.

Let there be no mistake, abortion is murder, the murder of the unborn, the murder of the innocent. Since the court case of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 when the Supreme Court declared that women have a constitutional right to have an abortion, there have been more than 62 million medical abortions in the United States. That means 62 million babies were robbed of their right to be born. Many of those babies were killed because they were inconvenient.

We can hardly go through a day without seeing a placard or commercial or ad reminding us that Black Lives Matter. I am in full agreement. Black lives do matter. It seems, however, that our culture has decided that the lives of unborn, Black babies don't matter. Abortion is the leading cause of death in the Black community. Any given year in New York City, more black babies are aborted than are born.

If you are an unborn Black baby, the likelihood of you one day dying a violent death is much higher than that of a White baby. What makes it so high is not that you will be targeted by a white police officer. Far more Whites are killed by police than are Black people. Your chance of dying a violent death is not high because you might be the victim of White-on-Black crime. The incidences of Black-on-Black crime are far higher than White-on-Black. Your greatest fear should be that of dying at the hands of an abortion doctor because Black mothers are three to four times more likely to get an abortion than are White mothers.

You may or you may not like what I'm going to say next, but as I said earlier, I don't care if you do or don't like it: A candidate for elected office who advocates and supports abortion can not be considered a good person, and you should not vote for such a person.

In our country we have far too many bad people in office because we made bad decisions and put them there.

Also, if a candidate wants to rob the American people of their constitutional rights or if they want to take away your liberty and freedom, they are not good people; they don't deserve the office they seek. Don't put them there. Don't vote for bad people. If they get in office and demonstrate they are not good people, don't re-elect them no matter what they promise. Bad people have no problem with failing to fulfill their promises.

Let's see what comes next in Judges 9. Let's read vv.7-21. Jotham was the only remaining son of Gideon. When all of his other brothers were murdered by Abimelech, Jotham survived because he hid himself. He could have kept his survival a secret, but he risked his own life to speak truth to power. He told a fable. The main point is the leaders of Shechem made a bad decision in choosing Abimelech to be King. Abimelech had the moral stature of a low-lying thornbush. A two-foot high thornbush will not provide you any shade, but it will make you bleed.

Likewise, Abimelech was not going to provide rest to the people, but he would be the cause of pain and suffering.

Don't elect people who are moral dwarves. Elect people who stand strong and tall morally. Morality matters. We read in Proverbs 14:34, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." We need righteous men and women serving this nation. King Solomon tells us in Proverbs 29:2, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan."

That brings us to the next point:

When Bad Men Rule, A Heavy Price Will Be Paid by Many

In vv. 22-57 we are told what happened during the three-year reign of Abimelech. There was disagreement, dissension, deception, and death—a lot of death. I'm not going to read all those verses; so, let me give a quick summary.

Abimelech and the leaders in Shechem didn't get along. They didn't trust one another. Imagine that. The leaders wanted to get rid of Abimelech. They threw their support behind a rival who spoke ill of Abimelech. An Abimelech supporter who was aware of the plot against his guy sent messengers to warn Abimelech. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

You are familiar with the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." King Abimelech lived by a different motto. His was, "Do one unto others before they do one unto you."

Abimelech stayed one step ahead of his critics. He got them before they could get him. A man named Gaal was Abimelech's chief nemesis. Look at vv. 39-41.

Look at vv. 42-45. Notice also v. 46 and v. 49. Look at v. 49. That is when Abimelech's luck ran out. Notice vv. 52-55. Death reigned when this bad man ruled.

Such is often the case when bad men rule.

It has been said that good ideas have good consequences, and bad ideas have bad consequences. One particularly bad idea that has had devastating consequences is

Marxism, the teachings of Karl Marx. He taught that we can divide society into two camps: the capitalists and the workers. The capitalists own the factories, the farms, the businesses, the means of production, and the materials. The workers sell themselves, so to speak, to the capitalists. They do the work in the factories, farms, and businesses, but the capitalists reap the lion's share of the profits. Marx taught that the workers needed to rise up, overthrow the capitalists, and eventually, there would be a classless society in which everyone shared equally.

Vladimir Lenin acted on what Marx taught. He led a revolt in Russia. The Civil War which followed resulted in 6 million dead. Lenin's forces prevailed, and he killed another 3 million of his own people.

Joseph Stalin succeeded Lenin in 1924. He reigned until his death in 1953. Some historians claim that during Stalin's reign some 20 million people died as a direct result either of government action or inaction. There were massacres, judicial executions, forced labor camps, and artificially induced famines in which millions starved to death.

Marx taught there is no God; so, under Russian Communism, the state became God, and as God, the state decided who lived and who died.

The worst incarnation of Marx's teaching occurred under the leadership of Mao Tse-Tung known as Chairman Mao. He established the People's Republic of China in 1949. He remained the Chairman of the Communist Party and the leader of China until his death in 1976. It has been estimated that the number of people who died under his 27-year reign range from 40 million to as many as 80 million. Those deaths were accomplished through starvation, persecution, prison labor, and mass executions.

When bad men act on bad ideas, bad things happen. Many people will suffer and die. The testimony of history agrees with the terrible truth of that statement. Time doesn't permit me to tell the stories of the atrocities committed by Adolph Hitler in Germany, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Idi Amin in Uganda, the Kim Dynasty in North Korea (Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Jong-Un), and Sadaam Hussein Iraq. All of them and many others are simply bad men acting on bad ideas.

In our day, many bad ideas are being embraced—Critical Race Theory, Marxist philosophy, and socialistic utopian dreams. We need to counter those ideas with the teachings of Scripture.

Do you know where the forefathers of our country got such notions as all men are created equal, Natural Law, the ownership of private property, the right to a fair trial, no conviction without two or three witnesses, punishment that fits the crime, the importance of morality, a Republican form of government, the rule of law, and many other principles that are part of who we are and how we do things in our country? Where did they get those things? They got them from the Bible.

Those ideas have stood the test of time. Good ideas have good consequences.

When Bad Men Rule, God Will Surely Execute His Judgment

We have already taken a brief look at what happens in the second half of Judges 9. Without getting lost in all the detail, what can we draw out of this passage? Consider

what Dale Davis wrote, “Lest we miss the point, the writer frames this last section with unmissable statements that here God was instigating and executing His judgment on Abimelech and Shechem (vv. 23-24, 56-57).”

Have you ever left something out in the elements for several years? It might be wood or plastic. After a few years of rain and cold, whatever it is, it cracks, and crumbles, and practically dis-integrates. That’s the way God’s judgment works. It works silently without drawing attention to itself. Quoting again from Davis, “We need to beware of thinking that God avenges only when He makes a racket.”

In our story, Abimelech destroyed Shechem, and Shechem, with a little help from a lady in Thebez, destroyed Abimelech. The point is that evil destroyed evil. God often used evil men to destroy evil men, and evil nations to destroy evil nations.

When God is silent, that does not mean He is absent. God works quietly, and sometimes He works incognito by working through the actions of others.

If we will simply look to Him, God will not abandon us to the continual rule of bad men. Isaiah, 700 years before the coming of Jesus, saw the arrival of one of whom he wrote, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.”

We look forward to the coming of Jesus and His righteous, eternal rule, but until then, we live in this world, and we are to be salt in this world. We are to be a preservative that keeps the communities in which we live from moral and spiritual decay. We must not abandon the world of politics and leave it to bad men and bad women. Your grandchildren and great grandchildren deserve better. I believe God is calling Christians young and old to become educated about what is going on in our country and to run for political office. If He is not calling you to run, He is calling you to stand for what is right and to stand against what is wrong.

As we sang this morning, let’s all stand up for Jesus till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed.