

The Failure of Idols

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church.

And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace. And no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

We're continuing our series in the book of Judges. And you'll remember that the book of Judges is about a number of things. It's about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. It's about the need for a faithful and true king, a king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men. It's about the power of spirit-filled leadership.

[1 : 13] It's about God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me. This morning we're picking up in Judges chapter 18.

You may remember, if you've been with us, that as we ended chapter 16, we actually ended the story of the Judges, if we think about Judges as the leaders of God's people.

And while we may be finished with the Judges, we are not finished with the book of Judges. Since the last five chapters, turn away from Israel's leaders and instead show us what life was like for normal, everyday people, Monday through Sunday.

Last week, or two weeks ago now, in chapter 17, we met the figure of Micah. And you'll remember that Micah had stolen 1,100 pieces of silver from his mom. He found out that she had cursed whoever had stolen the silver.

And so to avoid the curse, he quickly gave it back to her. And both of them used it to set up idols, violating what we looked at earlier this morning, the second commandment. In fact, in the first five verses, they managed to break four of God's Ten Commandments.

[2 : 20] And so we talked about the fact that they had lots of religious show, no religious substance. They had lots of religious superstition, religious activity that wasn't tethered at all to any sort of real holiness or real obedience.

And we saw in verse 6 the phrase that we're now going to begin to hear at the very end of the book, that in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

This week in chapter 18, we're going to pick up on a theme that started last week that we left to the side because it comes more to the forefront in this chapter, which is the great disappointment, the great futility of idols.

Micah makes these idols in chapter 17 with great hope, great expectation, great trust. He finds out in chapter 18 just what a terrible decision that was.

And so with that, I invite you to turn with me in God's word. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn in your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word.

[3 : 31] And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 18, starting in verse 1.

In those days there was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the people of Dan was seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in.

For until then no inheritance among the tribes of Israel had fallen to them. So the people of Dan sent five able men from the whole number of their tribe, from Zorah and from Eshtael, to spy out the

land and to explore it.

And they said to them, Go and explore the land. And they came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah and lodged there. When they were by the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite.

And they turned aside and said to him, Who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What is your business here? And he said to them, This is how Micah dealt with me.

[4 : 38] He has hired me, and I have become his priest. And they said to him, Inquire of God, please, that we may know whether the journey on which we are setting out will succeed.

And the priest said to them, Go in peace. The journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord. Verse 7. Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had no dealings with anyone.

And when they came to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtail, their brothers said to them, What do you report? They said, Arise and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good.

And will you do nothing? Do not be slow to go, to enter in and possess the land. As soon as you go, you will come to an unsuspecting people. The land is spacious, for God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth.

Verse 11. So 600 men of the tribe of Dan, armed with weapons of war, set out from Zorah and Eshtail and went up and camped at Kiriath-Jerim in Judah.

[6 : 01] On this account, that place is called Mahanadan to this day. Behold, it is west of Kiriath-Jerim. And they passed on from there to the hill country of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah.

Verse 14. Then the five men who had gone to scout out the country of Laish said to their brothers, Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image?

Now therefore consider what you will do. And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite at the home of Micah and asked him about his welfare. Now the 600 men of the Danites, armed with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate.

And the five men who had gone to scout out the land went up and entered and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with 600 men armed with weapons of war.

Verse 18. And when these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household gods, and the metal image, the priest said to them, What are you doing?

[7 : 09] And they said to him, Keep quiet. Put your hand on your mouth and come with us and be to us a father and a priest. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man or to be priest to a tribe and a clan in Israel?

And the priest's heart was glad. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people. So they turned and departed, putting the little ones and the livestock and the goods in front of them.

When they had gone a distance from the home of Micah, the men who were in the houses near Micah's house were called out. And they overtook the people of Dan. And they shouted to the people of Dan who turned around and said to Micah, What is the matter with you that you come with such a company?

And he said, You take my gods that I made and the priest and go away and what have I left? How then do you ask me what is the matter with you? And the people of Dan said to him, Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows fall upon you and you lose your life with the lives of your household.

Then the people of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his home. Verse 27, But the people of Dan took what Micah had made and the priest who belonged to him.

[8 : 31] And they came to Laish to a people quiet and unsuspecting and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. And there was no deliverer because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone.

It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it. And they named the city Dan after the name of Dan, their ancestor, who was born to Israel.

But the name of the city was Laish at the first. And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves. And Jonathan, the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.

So they set up Micah's carved image that he made as long as the house of God was at Shiloh. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do thank you again for your word that you create, nurture, sustain life by your word. You did it in the creation of the world.

[9 : 39] And you do it through the scriptures that you've given to us. And so we ask this morning that you would give us life. That you would use this passage to encourage and to challenge us.

You'd use it to change us and to grow us. And most of all, you'd use it to show us, Jesus, that we would see our great need and we would also see his great mercy. You would use it to make us more and more like him.

We ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. As we begin chapter 18, we are confronted immediately with a major problem.

The tribe of Dan, which is one of the 12 tribes of Israel, it turns out, actually have no territory. They do not have the land that they need and that raises the question of why not.

Well, that, to understand, would take us all the way back to chapter 1. You might remember back in chapter 1, we heard the story of how the different tribes were coming in and taking the territory that belonged to them.

[10 : 41] And yet, part of the warning at the very beginning of the book of Judges, part of the foreshadowing was that we saw that they were not actually able to take the land that God had given them.

You may also remember one commentator said this, that they said we could not take the land and God in chapter 1 basically says, no, you would not take the land.

You were not faithful. You did not believe the promises that I gave to you. And so this failure that we encounter right here at the beginning is this lack of faith and obedience.

The lack of obedience from the tribe of Dan is catching up with them. In fact, there's a problem that's not explicit in the passage but that we know from geography which is that they are squeezed in.

The tribe of Dan does not have what they need in terms of land to grow crops, to sustain themselves, and to feed themselves. And so their disobedience has really, in a sense, put them into a corner.

[11 : 39] They don't have the land they actually need to survive. And so that, rather than obedience and faith and trust in God, is what's pushing them to finally do what they should have done a long time ago.

It makes sense then that this is the land that they take. We're told in verse 10, it is a place where there is no lack of anything that is in the earth.

So they're living, not enough land, not the right land. Suddenly they find the spies that go out the greatest land. Now we're getting ahead of ourselves here though.

This story breaks up into several parts and the first couple parts are these two expeditions. The first expedition is the expedition of five men who are meant to spy.

And then after that there's an expedition of 600 men who are meant to capture. And so we find first the spying expedition in verse 2.

[12 : 40] These five men are sent out and what is it that they discover very quickly? Well in verse 4 they run across our character that we met in the last chapter, Micah.

And you may remember I told you Micah was looking for work. He had a LinkedIn profile. He had changed his profile picture and it said open to work because he wanted everyone to make sure that they knew that he was a Levite and he was ready to serve in whatever way possible.

Of course that's what he's excited to tell them. He shares with them in verse 4 how good this is.

This is how Micah dealt with me. He has hired me and I have become a priest.

In other words wow look at me guys I got the job I have the income I made the deal. Notice what Micah doesn't say. He doesn't say wow I am so grateful that God has given me this position so I can serve him and teach people his ways.

Now we already know from last chapter Micah is not really that interested in teaching people God's ways. He's someone who has figured out how to use religious service simply for an income.

[13:52] That's a foreshadowing in and of itself of what's going to happen to Micah next. If he's interested in one good job will he not of course be interested in an even better job?

And that's what's going to be offered to him. Knowing that he's a Levite of course they want a word from the Lord verses 5 and 6 to know if their journey is going to be successful.

And this is actually one of the stranger parts of this passage. We don't hear that Micah actually inquires of the Lord. There's no indication that this is a true word that he gives them. Even more than that it's extremely ambiguous.

Look with me at verse 6. He says the journey on which you go is under the eye of the Lord. Which means what? I don't know.

Yeah, God's aware of your journey. It's under his eye. It could be good. It could be bad. I don't know. He's in a sense a wise false teacher.

[14:53] He gives them something that could go in multiple directions. These men though looking for God's favor hear exactly what they want to hear.

So they go out. They spy out the land. Verses 7 through 10 they see, hey, this is a place that is ripe for the picking. It's a good land and it's an unsuspecting land.

Remember later it says they took it because they were so far away from the Sidonians. They had no communication with anyone. They didn't have the allies they needed. And so the spying expedition goes extremely well.

We move quickly to the conquering expedition verses 11 through 20 but things very quickly get pretty strange. Verse 14, we see the scouts who have gone ahead decide to give the 600 men sort of this inside scoop.

They tell them, hey, we met this guy named Micah and they say this. This is verse 14. Do you know that in these houses there are an ephod, household gods, a carved image, and a metal image?

[15:58] Now therefore, consider what you will do. In other words, hey guys, we just want to make sure you know there's some great things in this house. I'm not going to tell you what to do with that.

You do what you want. What do we find out right away? The 600 men make a show of force outside of the house and they go ahead, they steal the idols and they take Micah as well.

In fact, in verses 16 and 17 here, this is simply that. It's a show of force. The 600 men, they don't have to do any fighting. They just stand by the entrance of the house so that Micah and his people know there is no point in pushing back.

This battle is over before it's begun. With the 600 men outside, the five men who are the scouts go in, they plunder the house, they get what they want. Micah should here be providing some sort of protection.

We're moving forward to verses 18 through 20. But instead, they tell him, hey, keep your mouth shut. Verse 4, he's told them, wow, I have a job.

[17:06] Isn't this great? Verse 19, they say, wow, you know what? We'll give you a better job. Is it better for you to be a priest to the house of one man or to be a priest to a tribe and a clan in Israel?

And how does Micah respond? Does he say, no, I have to remain faithful to God and his ways.

Don't you realize you're breaking the eighth commandment?

You're stealing things you shouldn't steal. Don't you realize God's blessing may not be with you because you haven't obeyed him? No, that's not Micah's word. Verse 20, and the priest's heart was glad.

Micah has the promotion he wants. His influence, his power, perhaps his compensation are going up.

Then Micah decides he's going to chase them down. This is verses 21 through 26. He quickly realizes he's outgunned and overpowered, so he heads home. Conquering expedition, they roll in to Laish, they find that it's unprotected, they conquer it, they wreck it.

[18:17] Very end, we have this sad note, verse 31. They set up a rival worship site to God's true worship site at Shiloh. So what do we do?

What does the author of Judges want us to understand from chapter 18 as we think about Micah's story, his setting up of the idols, his hiring of the Levite, and then his losing of him?

Some of it, we see a similar theme to last week. Remember last week, we talked about the fact that they were full of religious show and they had no religious substance.

And we see that all over again as the story continues here. They care about having a Levite, right? Just like Micah did. The men of Dan want the same thing. They don't care about the fact that maybe they're stealing a lot of things and doing some underhanded business to get there.

They want to know that God is with them. It's important to them that the Levite gives them this word of success on the one hand. On the other hand, they really don't care about how crazy the stuff they're doing is.

[19 : 21] Right? Religious show, no religious substance. They end up doing what God says he hates in the name of worshiping God and honoring God.

Following after God on the one hand, supposedly setting up a rival worship site on the other hand. Of course, sad here, the Levite obviously cares about money and prestige.

He cares not at all for God's honor and his glory. No, he's available to the highest bidder. Whoever pays him gets his services.

And so that's a repetition in a sense a continuation of the theme from last week. What's new about this week is this, Micah's idolatry finally comes home to roost.

The stupidity of the creation of these idols, the fact that he made this carved image and the metal image, he has the ephod, the household gods in the shrine, the consequences of that finally come out to bear.

[20 : 27] He gets to face the music of what he's done. And just for a sake of review, we've seen this quote before, but I'm going to invite you to look at page eight of your worship guide.

As we talk about idolatry, we're talking about this larger concept of what it is that we worship and love. And we're told this as a definition. Idolatry is loving anything more than Jesus Christ.

Idolatry is treating anything as more important than Jesus Christ for your meaning in life, for your happiness, for your security and hope, or for your self-regard.

Idolatry is looking to good things as great things. It's taking something that's good and saying, I want this to give me something that God alone can provide. I want this thing, in this case, Micah wants the idols to give him the security and success that only God can bless him with.

And so we come to the most perhaps devastating statement in this entire chapter. And this perhaps is the key to chapter 18. And it's in verse 24.

[21 : 34] Micah has his idols stolen from him and he says this, You take my gods that I made and the priest and go away and what have I left?

In other words, this was what was most important to me. This was where I had placed all my trust and confidence. You take this, I have nothing left.

And it's his own words that reveal how tragic this is because before he says that, he already admits, my gods that I made.

of course they're powerless, right? Of course they can't deliver him. Of course they can't provide hope and security.

They didn't make him, he made them. So the point of chapter 18 is very simple and it's this.

[22 : 52] Idols will always break your heart. Idols will always disappoint.

They will never deliver on their promises. What are these gods supposed to do? They're supposed to protect Micah.

What ends up happening? He is totally plundered, right? They cannot do what they promise to do. Idols may not break your heart today, right?

We didn't see them breaking Micah's heart in chapter 17. Give it enough time and they will. Play the timeline out long enough and your idols will leave you high and dry.

Idols will always break your heart. It's not just that Micah has lost what's most valuable to him.

[24 : 10] It's that he finally realizes what is most valuable to him is completely weak and powerless. And so there's a sense here in which the punishment fits the crime.

Micah steals from his mom. Remember last chapter? What happens? Those very same things are stolen from him. Micah steals from mom. Dan steals from Micah no honor among thieves.

Idolatry works like this. If you live by the sword you'll die by the sword. If you live for money you'll die by money.

If you live for romance you will be devastated by romance. If you value power above all else you will be crushed by power.

If you pursue comfort more than anything else you will find yourself extremely uncomfortable.

Maybe not today but eventually it will come back.

[25 : 28] not saying that we shut ourselves off to those things money and romance and power have their place and their value in life and we keep them in the right place.

We maintain the right perspective. We know these are not the things that will save us and rescue us. We see in this chapter why it is that we flee away from idols.

It's not because God is a kill joy. It's not because he hates for his people to have fun. It's not because he doesn't want them to enjoy the good things that he's brought into his creation.

It is this. We flee away from idols because that protects us from great danger. it is God who will not break our hearts.

You'll see this on verse 9 of your worship guide summarizing the warning and the danger of idols and it says this ultimately we pay the cost of putting ultimate trust in what can never deliver ultimate security.

[26 : 49] Ultimately it seems we never learn that false gods never fail to fail. That is the only thing about a false god that you can depend on.

False gods fail that is their only truth. Do you want life?

Worship of the true God is the only safe worship. hope in the true God is the only hope that will not disappoint.

Security in the true God is the only one that will not fail. Idols will always break your heart.

I told you that there's a key verse here in verse 24. there's another final gut punch we get here at the very end. You may have noticed that last chapter, chapter 17, we were told that Micah had a name.

[28 : 05] It was Micah. We were not told the name of the Levite. And the author of Judges strategically saves it here for the very end of the story.

Verse 30. Who is this unfaithful Levite?

Who is this man who cares about money and power and influence more than anything else? This is Moses' grandson. the grandson of one of the greatest leaders of God's people.

And so what the author is telling us is this, this is how far Israel has fallen. This is how bad things actually are.

even Moses' grandson has given in. Even he has abandoned God's ways.

[29 : 15] And the point of all of this is not to make us discouraged or pushed down. No, it's to drive us to what we saw in verse one. In those days, there was no king in Israel.

In case there is any doubt, what the author is trying to tell us is this, Israel needs rescue. And that rescue will not come from a man.

It wasn't going to come from Samson. It will not come from the descendants of Moses. No, Israel needs someone even greater and more powerful. We might say that Israel needs a faithful and true king.

Israel needs a king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men. And so once again, judges is pointing us forward, right?

This is something that Solomon and David will not be able to do. What Israel needs is not a earthly king, but a divine king. Micah has to look to something beyond idols for security and blessing.

[30 : 24] And as we now know the end of the story, we know that Jesus is the true and greater king. we know that he is the one and the only one who can rescue a people that have fallen this far.

Last week, we talked about Jesus as the true king who rules by his spirit, right? As he's ascended to the right hand of God the Father, that he's the one who's able to change the hearts of his people in a way the judges never could.

This week, we see Jesus is the true king who can provide what idols can only promise. Jesus is the one who gives his people the security that they long for.

Idols can arouse and entice they can never fulfill. And why is it that we look to Jesus as the one who gives us those ultimate things?

Jim already read it for us this morning. It's on page three of your worship guide. Jesus makes this promise in Matthew chapter six as he's preaching the sermon on the mount. He says, therefore, do not be anxious.

[31 : 33] This is verse 31, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles, in other words, the idolaters, those who worship carved images and metal images, seek after these things and your heavenly father knows that you need them all.

idols can arouse and entice, they cannot fulfill. Jesus says here, I will provide. Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? My hope is the true hope. My security, the true security, my provision, the true provision.

look to me, not to what you've made with your hands. And how do we know that Jesus' promise to us is true?

How do we trust his words here in Matthew chapter six? We trust them because we have an even greater promise that has been kept. We trust them because we look and we see that Jesus came and lived the perfect life that we should have lived.

[32 : 51] He came and died the death that we should have died as a punishment for our sins. He kept his promise to his people. And as I've told you many times before, Romans chapter eight, verses 31 and 32 tell us, hey, look, he who gave you his own son, will he not also with him give you all things?

If he gave you the great thing, will he not give you the small things? You don't need to look to idols. you can look to him. He's given you ultimate things and give you all things.

So we trust him, we follow him above and beyond everything else. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that by being anxious, we can't add a single hour to our life.

You care for us and protect us. You give what idols can only promise. We ask that you would remind us of that this morning, that you would stir it up in our hearts, that we would believe it more and more, that we would look to you and you alone as our hope, our comfort, our protection, our provision.

We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.