

Compound Sin

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[0 : 00] 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.

A 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's 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 are continuing our series in the Book of Judges, completely unrelated to the Book of Judges. Today is June the 9th, and I've been reflecting on the fact that it was June the 7th of 2017 that my U-Haul arrived in Colorado Springs.

And it was June the 12th, Monday of 2017 that was my first day of work at Cheyenne Mountain. So I'm hitting seven years. Thank you.

[1 : 11] And so I've been reflecting on that, and I just wanted to say I'm so grateful to be with all of you and to still be here in Colorado Springs, Cheyenne Mountain. We're continuing our series in the Book of Judges.

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.

And it's about the power of spirit-filled leadership. And it's about God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me.

Last week, we looked at Judges chapter 19, and I told you that Judges 19 is arguably the most tragic, the most violent, the most gruesome story in the entire Bible, out of all 66 books and almost 1,200 chapters.

And we saw that that is, in fact, how it all ends when everyone does what is right in his own eyes. That is the end state, the ugly fruit of autonomy and individualism.

[2 : 23] And I told you that we cannot have a beautiful community and also demand what is most convenient for us. That's the sober warning that comes at the end of the Book of Judges.

Now, this week, as we head into chapter 20, we're going to see the nature of sin, the ugly nature of it, and what happens when we leave it unaddressed, when we refuse to fight it or put it to death.

And with that, I invite you to turn with me to Judges chapter 20. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word.

And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 20, starting at verse 1.

Then all the people of Israel came out from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah.

[3 : 28] And the chiefs of all the people of all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the assembly of God, 400,000 men on foot that drew the sword. Now the people of Benjamin heard that the people of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.

And the people of Israel said, Tell us, how did this evil happen? And the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, I came to Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to spend the night.

And the leaders of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. They meant to kill me, and they violated my concubine, and she is dead. So I took hold of my concubine and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel.

For they have committed abomination and outrage in Israel. Behold you, people of Israel, all of you, give your advice and counsel here. Verse 8, And all the people arose as one man, saying, None of us will go to his tent, and none of us will return to his house.

But now this is what we will do to Gibeah. We will go up against it by lot, and we will take ten men of a hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and a hundred of a thousand, and a thousand of ten thousand, to bring provisions for the people, that when they come they may repay Gibeah of Benjamin, for all the outrage that they have committed in Israel.

[5 : 00] So all the men of Israel gathered against the city, united as one man. And the tribes of Israel sent men throughout all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What evil is this that has taken place among you?

Now, therefore, give up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and purge evil from Israel. But the Benjaminites would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the people of Israel.

Then the people of Benjamin came together out of the cities of Gibeah to go out to battle against the people of Israel. And the people of Benjamin mustered out of their cities on that day twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who mustered seven hundred chosen men.

Among all these were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed. Everyone could sling a stone at a hare and not miss. And the men of Israel, apart from Benjamin, mustered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword.

All these were men of war. Verse 18. The people of Israel arose and went up to Bethel and inquired of God, Who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?

[6 : 13] And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first. Then the people of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. And the men of Israel went out to fight against Benjamin, and the men of Israel drew up the battle line against them at Gibeah.

The people of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and destroyed on that day twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. But the people, the men of Israel, took courage and again formed the battle line in the same place where they had formed it on the first day.

And the people of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until the evening. And they inquired of the Lord, Shall we again draw near to fight against our brothers, the people of Benjamin?

And the Lord said, Go up against them. Verse 24. So the people of Israel came near against the people of Benjamin the second day.

And Benjamin went against them out of Gibeah that second day and destroyed eighteen thousand men of the people of Israel. All these were men who drew the sword. Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept.

[7 : 18] They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days.

And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days, saying, Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin? Or shall we cease?

And the Lord said, Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand. Verse 29. So the men set in ambush around Gibeah.

So Israel set men in ambush around Gibeah. And the people of Israel went up against the people of Benjamin on the third day and set themselves in array against Gibeah as at other times.

And the people of Benjamin went out against the people and were drawn away from the city. And as at other times, they began to strike and kill some of the people in the highways, one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah.

[8 : 21] And in the open country, about thirty men of Israel. And the people of Benjamin said, They are routed before us as at the first. But the people of Israel said, Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways.

And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place and set themselves in array at Baal Tamar. And the men of Israel who were in ambush rushed out of their place from Merah Geba. And there came

against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel.

And the battle was hard. But the Benjaminites did not know that disaster was close upon them. And the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the people of Israel destroyed twenty-five thousand one hundred men of Benjamin that day.

All these were men who drew the sword. So the people of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel gave ground to Benjamin because they trusted the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah.

Verse thirty-seven. Then the men in ambush hurried and rushed against Gibeah. The men in ambush moved out and struck all the city with the edge of the sword. Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in the main ambush was that when they made a great cloud of smoke rise up out of the city, the men of Israel should turn in battle.

[9 : 40] Now Benjamin had begun to strike and kill about thirty men of Israel. They said, Surely they are defeated before us as in the first battle. But when the signal began to rise out of the city in a column of smoke, the Benjaminites looked behind them.

And behold, the whole of the city went up in smoke to heaven. Then the men of Israel turned and the men of Benjamin were dismayed. For they saw that disaster was closed upon them.

Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness. But the battle overtook them. And those who came out of the cities were destroying them in their midst.

Surrounding the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Noha as far as opposite Gibeah on the east. Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor.

And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the Rock of Rimen. Five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways. And they were pursued hard to get them. And two thousand men of them were struck down.

[10 : 45] So all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword, all of them men of valor. But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the Rock of Rimen and remained at the Rock of Rimen for months.

And the men of Israel turned back against the people of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword. The city, men and beasts, and all that they found. And all the towns that they found, they set on fire.

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 that you haven't left us alone as orphans in a merciless universe, but instead you've given us your word.

You've given us the Old Testament and the New Testament. You've spoken to us to guide us and challenge us and instruct us, and most of all, to show us Christ. That we would know and see and understand our need for His grace and how He meets us at that very same place of need.

And so we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would use your word in a powerful way, that we would see your beauty and your glory and your mercy more than ever before, that it would lead us to love you, to worship you, to follow you.

[12 : 07] We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. You'll remember that our story last week ended on a particularly gruesome note.

As the Levite takes his concubine, who has been violated, he cuts her into 12 different pieces, and then sends those pieces all throughout Israel.

And we have this chilling statement at the very end of chapter 19 in verse 30, which reminds us of how terrible this is. And it says, Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day.

Consider it. Take counsel and speak. And we see here at the beginning of chapter 20 that this graphic statement that the Levite makes certainly has the impact that he has intended.

There are a lot of things going on in chapter 20, and we will certainly not be able to get into all of them this morning. But if there's one thing that the author of Judges wants us to know, it is this.

[13 : 22] Israel has incredible unity. And in fact, we hear it and see it over and over. Verse 1, All the people of Israel came out.

Same verse. The congregation assembled as one man. Verse 7, Behold you people of Israel, all of you. We saw in verse 2, the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel.

Verse 8, All the people arose as one man. Verse 11, All the men of Israel gathered, united, as one man.

You think that we've heard it enough? Nope. Verse 26, All the people of Israel, the whole army. And in case we missed it, we're also told, verse 1, they came from Dan to Beersheba.

Dan being the northernmost point of Israel, Beersheba being the southernmost point. In other words, over and over again, the author repeats this, so that we know Israel, Israel, in the midst of a book full of their factions and selfishness and infighting, are finally gathered together.

[14:42] With, of course, one exception. Verse 3 reminds us, Benjamin was not there. Why?

Well, the men of Gibeon are Benjaminites. And so they decide not to show up to answer for the actions of their own people. And as we read this and think and see that Israel is finally gathered together, they finally have one mind and one mission, there is this sadness and this irony that we're meant to feel.

Why couldn't they do this back in chapter 1? Why does it take such a gruesome and violent action for Israel to finally be what she should have been?

And in fact, it's not just a question of why did this not happen back in chapter 1. No, even more than that, there are echoes here of chapter 1. Now, I know it's been a long time, it's been about a year since we started the book of Judges, and so you have to think all the way back to what we saw at the very beginning.

But the reason that Israel is in this problem is because they refused to do what God had told them to do. They refused to drive out the Canaanites. And what is it that we read at the very beginning?

[16:09] Not just chapter 1, verse 1, they go to God and they say, who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites? And God answers them, verse 2, Judah shall go.

In case we miss it, here in chapter 20, we see the exact same words. Verse 18, who shall go up first for us to fight against the people of Benjamin?

Same verse, Judah shall go up first. As I've told you many times, bookends are extremely powerful. It is not a coincidence that we see this in chapter 1 and chapter 20. The author is telling us this.

You would not drive out the Canaanites in chapter 1. You wouldn't fight God's enemies in chapter 1. Well, guess what?

[17:10] Now in chapter 20, you get to fight each other. You can either fight your enemies on the outside or you can destroy yourself on the inside.

Those are the only choices. Last week, we said this is how it ends when everyone does what is right in their own eyes. This week, we get to see this is how it all ends when sin is not addressed. You can fight sin now or you can fight it later, but you will fight it one day. You can face enemies on the outside or you can self-destruct on the inside.

In fact, the principle that we've waited 20 chapters to get to is this. Sin does not just sit there. It grows and grows and grows.

I have two personal characteristics which are a bad combination. One of them is that sometimes I can be a little bit clumsy and the other one is that I like to drink a lot of coffee.

[18:31] And when those two traits interact, what that results in is I get a large number of coffee stains on my clothes. The good thing about that though is this.

Coffee is one of the easiest stains to get out. It's contained. It's not going to spread. It's not red wine. I can wash it today.

I can wash it next week. I can wash it next month. It is going to come out. As long as I don't wait six months, as long as I don't wait a year, it's going to be fine.

It's not going to get worse. I'm going to be able to address it. I can do it on my own timeline. The problem is this. Sometimes we think about sin that way. It's contained.

It's going to be there when I want to deal with it. I can address it when I want to address it. And when I choose to address it, I'll be able to get rid of it. While I wait, nothing will get worse.

[19:35] Yet the problem is this. Sin is not a coffee stain. Sin is in fact a cancer. Sin is like mold.

It grows and grows and grows. The longer it is left unaddressed, the larger it gets. There's a domino effect to sin.

Israel refused to drive out the Canaanites in chapter 1. They have become like the Canaanites in chapter 20.

Their failure, their refusal to drive out the pagan nations has finally come home to roost. They left it alone and it grew and grew and grew.

Israel thought that she could have her cake and eat it too. She thought she could have a halfway compromise with sin and still have all the benefits of God's people.

[20 : 41] And now we see at the very end of the book, you can't have it both ways. You deal with sin now. You deal with it later.

One of those is much easier than the other. And so there's a sadness here. What would have happened if Israel had been obedient in chapter 1?

How many lives would have been saved? How much dignity would have been retained? And yet what happened? They didn't understand the threat. Israel didn't see the urgency. They didn't see the need to obey in hard ways that God had commanded them to go and be bold in battle and take out the foreign nations.

If they had been this unified in chapter 1, the story would have been very different. And so there is a warning here as we come to the end of the book and that's this.

There is great danger in spiritual complacency. There is great danger in refusing to address sin because it will only get worse.

[22 : 01] It may be hard to confront scandal and abuse in an organization and if you do not, it will get so bad you cannot hide it anymore.

You may shut yourself off to others and think that you can have connection and community one day when you choose it on your own terms. and then you wake up and you realize that your heart is hard and closed off and you're all alone.

You can face the consequences of your selfishness in your marriage now or you can face it later. The longer you wait, the harder it gets.

We can choose to ignore compromise and error in God's church. And not only will it not go away, it will get worse the longer we wait.

You can refuse to discipline your kids now and the problems and the challenges will only grow with each year.

[23 : 25] you can refuse to reconcile with your brother or your sister. The distance will only increase. The challenge will only be more.

Sin collects interest day by day, year by year. You'll see this on page 10 of your worship guide.

Albert Einstein is famous for saying the most powerful force in the universe is compound interest. We might say that the most destructive force in the universe is compound sin.

The longer we wait, the worse it gets. sin is on a relentless march. It's not stopping and when you ignore it, it gains ground.

The cancer that has been killing Israel for 19 chapters finally gets so bad they can't turn their eyes anymore.

[24 : 40] It's finally metastasized. It's finally terminal. They have become worse than the nations around them.

And so the point is simple. Christian, deal with it now. Obedience is hard.

Disobedience is even harder. again on page 10 of your worship guide, be killing sin or sin will be killing you.

If Israel had done that very thing in chapter 1, chapter 20 would look very different. Thankfully, we don't simply see a sober warning in Judges chapter 20.

we also see one of our major themes for Judges that has come up again and again, which is God's mercy towards hard-hearted people, people like you and me.

[25 : 51] And the good news is that even as everything is finally hemming in on Israel, God has not given up on his people. God is still at work guiding and protecting them.

Verse 35 at the beginning gives us the author's interpretation of this chapter. He tells us this, and the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. God still brings justice to and for his people.

God is still active in the story of Israel, and even more than that, God still gives guidance to his people. Note what they do here that they haven't done for some time.

They inquire of God three times. Three times, God answers. Verse 18, verse 23, verses 27 and 28. And in verse 28 he tells them this, go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand. And then verses 29 through 48 we see this ambush that they set up, their final move that brings them success and all its after effects.

[27 : 07] Which reminds us of this, in the midst of imperfection and sin and failure, God still hears his people.

In the midst of Israel's mess, God has not given up. Which returns us to something we haven't talked about for a few chapters now which is this, no matter where you are and no matter what

you've done, because of God's grace, there is still hope.

Now there's some odd things here. There's three different battles. The first two battles, Israel loses and loses a bunch of men. It's not until the end that they actually have success and that raises this question, like why is it that God doesn't allow them to conquer in the first battle?

There's all sorts of different theories at work. People have different ideas. Ultimately, we don't know. We're not told. What we do know is this, God still listens to his people.

God listens to his people despite the compromise of Benjamin, the fact that they're not willing to hand over this subset from Gibeah. God listens to his people even though the Levite runs a spin story and changes a bunch of the facts about what happened with his concubine.

[28 : 34] God still listens to his people even though they have let the influence of the culture around them twist them and change them and shape them. That reminds us of what we already read for us this morning.

Hebrews 10 verse 19. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. Why does God listen to his people?

Not because they've earned it. Not because they deserve it. They don't. No, he listens to them. He stays in their story because and only because of his great mercy and grace.

His grace to hard-hearted people, people like you and me. Because we have a true and faithful king.

A king who can do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts of men. It's the promise of the gospel. It's the promise for you if you're in Christ.

[29 : 45] If you're a Christian following after him and you know that you haven't deserved it and you haven't earned it, but instead you look in faith to Christ who lived the perfect life that we should have lived and who died the death that we deserved, we know that God's words in 2 Timothy 2 are true for us.

If we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself. love. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you for your great mercy and your grace, your mercy to Israel in the midst of their failure, your mercy to us in the midst of our failures.

We ask that you would remind us of that truth and that you would grow our faith and trust in it, that we would follow you more and more with love and obedience. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.