

Upside Down

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Date: 12 May 2024

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[0 : 00] 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 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.

What I'm about to say has nothing to do with Judges chapter 17, but I was thinking this morning as we were worshiping, the longer I serve as a pastor, one of the emotions for me that grows and grows is that of gratitude.

I am more and more just grateful for the folks who come here every Sunday. There are many places that you could be this morning, and God called you here. And I'm grateful for every month that God sustains this church financially.

Grateful as he brings new people and he blesses them as they go out. And so I just want to say as we start this morning, I'm grateful for you. And I'm glad that you're here.

[1 : 16] And I always mean that, but I mean that I think more and more as the months go by. And so one of my catchphrases now, as I see many of you on Sunday mornings, I just say I'm glad you're here, and that's because I am. I'm grateful that God has brought this church community together.

With that, we are continuing our series in the book of Judges. And you will remember that the book of Judges is about many things. It is about our 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 is about the power of spirit-filled leadership, and it's about God's mercy to hard-hearted people, people like you and me.

Now, last time we were here, we finished the story of Samson, and you'll remember we saw God's redemption in Samson's life. He used Samson's greatest failure to bring about, in fact, Samson's greatest success.

We talked about that's the way that God's redemption works in this world, and I reminded you that wherever you are or whatever you've done, if you're still alive, all is not lost.

[2 : 35] That was the end of the lesson of Samson, and I told you for a while that Samson was the last and worst judge. And so there's a sense in which we are done with judges.

We are done with judges when it comes to them as people, as rulers of Israel. We, however, are not done with the book of Judges. So Samson ends in chapter 16.

Judges goes all the way to chapter 21, because now we move away from these central figures, these leaders, and instead the author of the book of Judges begins to tell us what it was like for normal, everyday Israelites.

We go from looking at the chiefs of God's people to what it was like day to day on the ground in Israel. And just as we saw with the judges, we're going to see with their people that there is a fast descent downwards.

As with that, I invite you to turn with me. We're in Judges chapter 17. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide.

[3 : 43] No matter where you turn, remember God tells us in Proverbs chapter 30 that every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 17, starting in verse 1. There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, The eleven hundred pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoken in my ears, Behold, the silver is with me.

I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be my son by the Lord. And he restored the eleven hundred pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, I dedicate the silver to the Lord from my hand for my son to make a carved image and a metal image.

Now, therefore, I will restore it to you. So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image.

And it was in the house of Micah. Verse 5. And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods and ordained one of his sons who became his priest.

[5 : 05] In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Now there was a young man of Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah who was a Levite, and he sojourned there.

And the man departed from the town of Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn where he could find a place. And as he journeyed, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.

And Micah said to him, Where do you come from? And he said to him, I am a Levite of Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to sojourn where I may find a place.

And Micah said to him, Stay with me and be to me a father and a priest. And I will give you ten pieces of silver a year and a suit of clothes and your living.

And the Levite went in. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became to him like one of his sons. And Micah ordained the Levite, and the young man became his priest and was in the house of Micah.

[6 : 14] Then Micah said, Now I know that the Lord will prosper me because I have a Levite as priest. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you that you do sustain us. You sustain this church day by day and month by month.

You sustain us in our lives, in our faith, by your spirit. And we thank you that you sustain us by your word. We ask that you would do that again this morning. That you would use it to instruct us and to challenge us.

You'd use it to encourage and comfort us. Most of all, you would use it to help us to see Jesus. That we would see his beauty and his glory and his majesty and his holiness.

We'd see his power and his authority. We'd see his mercy and his grace and his love. And we ask that you would be merciful to us, that you would not leave us where we are, but that you would remember us, that you'd change us, that you would use our time together this morning to change us and make us look more like your son and our savior, our Lord Jesus.

[7 : 33] It's in his name that we ask all of these things. Amen. Many of you know that for several years before and even a little bit after I went to seminary, I was a teacher.

And one of the concepts that I learned as a teacher was something called the irreducible minimum. It's a mouthful. But the irreducible minimum is what someone must know to move on to the next level.

So there are certain things that you must learn in third grade if you are going to have success in fourth grade. And so on and so forth. The reason that someone fails a grade is not because the school is cruel or mean, but because they're saying to you, look, you actually don't have what you need to succeed the next level.

If you cannot add or subtract, it is going to be very challenging for you to work with multiplication. I told you many times when we talked about Samson that Samson should have been taking senior level classes when it came to be an Israelite, and yet he was failing the most basic things.

He was failing 101. Now we move along, as I mentioned, from the leaders of Israel to those folks who lived on the ground every day, everyday Israelites.

[8 : 54] And as we look at the rest of the book of Judges, what we are going to see is that at best, God's people are failing. That the most basic things, the most elementary commands that God has given to his people, that's best.

At worst, God's people are doing unthinkable, unspeakable things. If you don't believe me, you can just look ahead to Judges chapter 19.

What is Israelite 101 if not the Ten Commandments? I talked about that earlier this morning in our confession of faith. Those are the basics, right, of all the rules and laws and commands God gave his people.

The Ten Commandments are the irreducible minimum. This is what they are meant to know most of all. This is what Jesus summarizes in Mark chapter 12. Remember, he says, the sum of the law is love of God and love of neighbor.

I mentioned the Ten Commandments here at the beginning of Judges chapter 17, and I mention the irreducible minimum because the original audience who is reading this story, any Israelite who is hearing about what Micah is doing should notice immediately the Ten Commandments are being broken left and right.

[10 : 19] In fact, it starts at the very beginning. Verse 2, Micah has something to confess to his mother. This is his way, I guess, of honoring Mother's Day. Ironical that we're here this morning.

Micah is not coming to his mother to confess that he broke a lamp, right, or he marked, you know, with his crayons in her favorite book. No, he just sort of casually stole from her 1,100 pieces of silver.

You may remember from the story of Samson and Delilah, 1,100 pieces of silver we've seen before. That was the amount of money each lord of the Philistines offered to Delilah if she would hand over Samson.

In other words, Micah has not taken \$5 from his mom's purse, okay? He has taken an enormous amount of money.

So we're starting out here. Eighth commandment, thou shalt not steal. One commandment down. Now, at the same time, Micah is able to kill two birds with one stone.

[11 : 24] You may realize he's also broken another commandment, the fifth commandment, honor your father and your mother. And in a sense, it's not just Micah who's broken that commandment, it's also his mom.

There's a man named G.I. Williamson who points out that the Ten Commandments, the fifth commandment, can be broken in two ways. The fifth commandment can be broken by children who refuse to honor their parents.

And it can also be broken by parents who do not require their children to honor them. And we can make a safe assumption here that Micah's an adult, we find out he actually has a child. This is the dynamic he is used to with his mother.

This is the way, perhaps, that he's been raised. I stole 1,100 pieces of silver. No big deal. I can just give it back. No consequence. So we've got two commandments broken at this point.

But wait, there's more. We move on from verse 2 to verse 3. His mom says, hey, let's dedicate this silver and we're gonna make a carved image and a metal image.

[12 : 34] What did we confess together this morning if not the second commandment, which says this, no carved images. We're now up from two of the commandments to three of them, but we are not done yet.

What happens in verse 5? They don't have just an idol. They don't have a household god. They have household gods, plural.

Second commandment. The first commandment tells us, no other gods. We are not meant to miss this. In five verses, Micah and his mother have broken four commandments.

And that is just scratching the surface. There is so much in this passage that is completely upside down.

In fact, we don't have time this morning to list everything that Micah and his mom do that is twisted and inside out. I'll give you just a few of them. Verse 2, Micah comes and it seems like maybe he's repenting of stealing the silver.

[13 : 42] No, there's no repentance. Micah is afraid that the curse is going to fall on him. That's why we're told in verse 2, he heard the curse and then he returned the silver.

Micah does not do this out of some sense of guilt or fear of God. No, he's very pragmatic. He was pragmatic in stealing the silver. He's pragmatic in returning the silver.

Oh, I didn't realize this was going to involve a curse. Well, in that case, mom, here all of it is back. Maybe you can take that back for me. The mom doesn't get off the hook either.

Verse 3, she takes the 1,100 pieces of silver and says, I'm going to dedicate this to God. We find out in verse 4, she gives not 1,100 pieces of silver, she gives 200 pieces of silver.

And so the reader is left wondering, what happened to the other 900 pieces? All is dedicated to God. Only some reaches at the end.

[14 : 44] Verse 5, they set up their own worship site, which is in direct violation to what God has taught his people. There is to be one place of worship that God has established.

And if that were not enough, Micah appoints, ordains his own son as a priest. And it should go without saying, God establishes priests, not men.

How are things going for God's people? Everything is upside down. And we could go on.

And commentators do on and on about everything in this passage that does not add up. That raises a question for us.

What in fact is Micah thinking? He should know, right? As an Israelite, he should know the irreducible minimum. It should be obvious to him what is obvious to the readers.

[15 : 54] That he is so far away from God and his commands. Well, thankfully, we are not left to wonder. We find out very quickly exactly what it is that Micah is thinking.

Verses 7 through 13. Now in verse 5, we found out that Micah made his son a priest. That is just for now. Micah is always willing to accept a better deal if it comes along.

He is always willing to make an upgrade. And what shows up but the best upgrade that Micah could dream of? If you're familiar with the Old Testament, you know that the Levites were the Israelite tribe that were designated to serve as priests.

And so those were the ones who were actually supposed to be managing God's house. And it's verses 7 through 8. Who comes along? What luck does Micah have but that a Levite stumbles across his path?

This Levite, we're told, is looking, this is verse 8, for where he could find a place. In other words, this Levite had gone on to his LinkedIn profile and his profile picture had a banner on it that said, Open to work.

[17 : 14] He needed a place to plug in and so he's wandering around. He is looking for a place to serve. Micah is open to an upgrade. This is a deal made in heaven.

There's a perfect match. The Levite wants work. Micah wants a Levite. And so they strike a deal, verses 10 through 12.

And without getting into lots of nitty-gritty detail, I'll just tell you this deal is highly irregular. This is not the way that Levites are supposed to be chosen. It's not the way they're supposed to be compensated.

This is not the way things work in God's house. But we've already gotten the picture that normal was thrown out a long time ago. And it's here that we finally get to the heart of the matter.

Micah reveals to us what in the world he is thinking. There are two key and critical verses in chapter 17. One of those is the last verse, verse 15.

[18 : 20] Then Micah said, Now I know that the Lord will prosper me because I have a Levite as a priest. What is Micah thinking?

Micah loves religious show. He has no religious substance. Micah is worried about certain rules.

Micah has no category for deep and real holiness. Micah has religious actions and he has religious activity.

And he does not have a heart for God. So what is Micah doing here? He makes it crystal clear that really all he's interested in doing is manipulating God.

He is just like the pagan nations around him. Religion is merely a superstition. In fact, religion is something you can make up as you go along.

[19 : 42] If you have the right priest, God will bless you. He is showing us superstition at its very worst.

In fact, one commentator says this, the Levite is nothing more than a good luck charm. We might say that Micah is like the Pharisees that Jesus condemns, clean on the outside, full of filth on the inside.

And so Judges 17 warns us about this. Possible for us as well to hide behind religious activity. It is possible to have religious show and pomp and circumstance untethered from a love for God and his ways.

It is possible to claim the Christian faith and have merely external compliance to certain rules.

It is possible to claim the Christian faith merely because of some sort of religious connection. Micah here gives us the formula.

[21 : 11] Now I know that the Lord will prosper me because I have a Levite as a priest. And so we might say this. Now I know the Lord will prosper me.

I might be cheating on my taxes, but my grandfather was a pastor. I might be destroying others with my mouth, but I was baptized.

and I grew up in the church. So I know that the Lord will prosper me. I might be immature and easily angered, but I have a big library that has a lot of theological books in it.

Now I know that the Lord will prosper me. me. I might lie and conveniently change the story when the truth catches up with me, but I read my Bible every day.

Now I know that the Lord will prosper me. of course, Micah could not be further from the truth.

[22 : 53] He set up a system that allows him to worship, something he can control, something that submits to his preferences, something that is mere superstition. Don't hear what I'm not saying.

These are not bad things. It is good to have a Levite as a priest. In fact, Levites should be priests, right? The problem is focusing on good things and missing the great things.

The problem is turning certain types of obedience into a superstition. Remember what Samuel, the prophet, says in 1 Samuel 15.

Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams.

God says the same thing through his prophets in other places. Amos 5 and Jeremiah 6. God comes to his people and says, I will not accept your burnt offerings because you practice injustice.

[24 : 06] What did Brit read from us? From Matthew chapter 23, Jesus comes and condemns the religious leaders. He says, look, you worry about tithing on your herbs and mint and cumin. You know what?

That's great. That's actually a good thing. And you've missed the weightier matters of the law. You've missed what matters most of all.

The saddest thing of this passage perhaps is this, that Micah says this with no hint of irony. He is in fact self-deceived. He actually believes that the Lord will actually prosper him.

that is how far Israel has fallen. That is how separated he is from what God actually calls his people to. And so the challenge for us is this.

Where have we traded God's heart for mere religious ritual? Where have we exchanged the love of God and the love of neighbor for going through the motions in the right place at the right time?

[25 : 25] Israel has fallen far. They will fall even farther. Because they truly have forgotten the Lord.

There's the problem here that Micah has of superstition. there's another problem that brings itself to the forefront in this passage and it's this. Micah and Israel make it up as they go along.

This is buffet style worship. We will make sure we have this. We're going to have the Levites. We'll take that from the buffet. We know Levites are good. We're going to reject God's appointed worship place.

We don't have a taste for that. We actually like having the worship site here in our town. It cuts down our gas mileage. It makes travel easier. We have the ephod here.

We don't have to go somewhere else to receive God's revelation. This is convenient. What works for us is what we are going to do. Of course, the same is a temptation for the church today.

[26 : 32] I don't need to worship God as he's commanded. I don't need to search the scriptures to know what it is that God wants in the worship of his people. I don't need to gather with his people as he's called them to do together.

No, I can make it up as I go along. You worship God at church. I worship God on the hiking trail. You think God has commanded you to read his word?

That's great. God has been speaking to me through the self-help books that have come along my way. That's good for you. This is good for me. There's a new way of making up what feels good in the moment.

You'll see this on page 7 of your worship guide. Micah's family shapes a God who is convenient to follow. They follow the laws they like and ignore the laws they don't.

Why is it that we take God's word and find a book and go from beginning to end? Because we want to protect ourselves from the temptation of the human heart which is to pick and choose.

[27 : 45] God's God's revelation for his people. We want to know the entire counsel of God. We want to worship God.

Not in the way that we like but in the way that God likes. You wouldn't give your mother today flowers she's allergic to.

right? We give God the worship that he has commanded. Not what suits us and our preferences and our entertainment.

I told you earlier there are two key verses in chapter 17. The first one was chapter 13 which reveals to us what's happening inside of Micah's heart and his mind.

The other key verse is verse 6 which is going to become a refrain in our final chapters. In those days there was no king in Israel.

[28 : 49] Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Now you can take that verse and I think it's meant in two senses. In the first sense there is a manner in which there is no earthly human king in Israel.

We are looking forward in a sense to the monarchy that's to come. Solomon and Saul and David have not yet shown up on the scene. So there's a restraint that's lacking.

There is however a second sense. We have already seen how deeply God's leaders fail. Samson did not lead God's people into peace.

Jethro was wildly ignorant of God's word. We're going to move on to Solomon and Saul and David who are all disappointments in their own way.

And so what Judges is pointing us to is beyond simply the period of the monarchy in Israel. The author of Judges is not merely saying hey they didn't have a human king and so that's why things were so crazy.

[29 : 54] No they did not have the king. they did not have what they needed. They were not honoring God as the one who rules and reigns over this world and over his people.

They did not have the Holy Spirit at work in a powerful way like we do now because the full and final and ultimate king had not come.

What do we do with the problems of Judges? Remember I've told you one of the problems is this that there is a need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. And the other need is for a faithful and true king.

Judges reminds us that we need not a false God. We need not a God that we can control through the right actions or through superstition. No, we need a God who can in fact transform the hearts and minds and lives of his people.

We need a true and greater king. Brothers and sisters, we have what the Israelites in Judges did not have.

[31 : 19] We have a true and greater king. The solution to the problem of Judges is not greater self-discipline.

The problem is not, the solution is not that they would study God's word even more intently so that they would be able to avoid the things that Jephthah and Micah do, as helpful as that would be.

No, the solution is our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus is the king who comes who can do what no human can do.

He is the king who comes and receives the punishment that God's people deserve. He is the king who comes and lives the perfect life that we could not live.

And he is the king who ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

[32 : 24] Why does it matter that he is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty? Because, remember, Jesus makes a promise to his people in John 14 and John 16. He says, I am going to send my spirit to you.

That's why he tells them, it is better that I go than that I stay. Because as Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father, he is sending out the Holy Spirit to be at work in the hearts and minds and lives of his people doing what no human can do, to change the hearts of men.

In fact, Jesus tells us this in John 14, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And if we left it right there, we would easily be crushed.

because who among us keeps God's commandments? Micah certainly doesn't. We're not crushed, though, because Jesus doesn't end it there.

Verse 16, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

[33 : 42] You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. brothers and sisters, we do, in fact, have a king.

We have what Israel could only dream of and look forward to. We have great hope that God will continue constant renewal and revival among his people, 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.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you for our Lord Jesus. We thank you that he's not merely or simply a good example.

We thank you that he's not just a good teacher, but we thank you that he is the king and ruler of this world and of your church. We ask that you would continue to honor your promise.

Jesus promised to send the spirit to his people, that you would be at work in our lives, in this church, that we would not be able to say there is no king here, but we would recognize you, worship you, follow you, and serve you as our Lord and our Savior and our King.

[35 : 10] We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen. Amen. Amen. You