

# Faithful Leader

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     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. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. And 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 him 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. We're continuing our series in the book of Judges. I believe this is week four now. And you'll remember that the book of Judges is about a variety of things. It's about the constant need for renewal and revival among God's people.

It's about the power that comes when you have a leader who's enabled by God's Holy Spirit. And it's also about the need for a faithful and true king. A king who's able to do what no human can do, which is to change the hearts and minds of men. And so as we enter week four, I want to remind you of where we've been. First of all, we are in this section of the history of God's people.

We are after Egypt, after God's people have come out of slavery. We are before the period of the kings. What they are doing right now is they're taking the promised land. So we're coming after the book of Joshua. Joshua was leading Israel and taking the promised land. In the book of Judges, they're meant to continue that job. What we saw week one, however, was that they had half-hearted obedience.

They obeyed, sort of. They failed to remember God's power in the past. And they also failed to trust God's promises for the present and the future. The second week, we saw the challenge and the opportunity and the responsibility of passing on our faith to the next generation. And then last week, we talked about God's mercy to hard-hearted people. And that's when we talked about the Judges' cycle, or as more appropriately called, the Judges' spiral, because things get worse and worse.

[ 2 : 1 2 ]     And so with all of that as background and preparation, now we are ready to begin and look at the very first of all the Judges' cycles. You'll remember from chapter 2, verse 19, we were told what's supposed to happen. There's a pattern. Things are going to start out good, and they're going to end terrible.

So we're going to look at two things together this morning. First, God's control, and second, our faith. God's control, and our faith. And it's with that that I invite you to turn with me to God's Word.

You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn in your worship guide. But 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 is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now Judges chapter 3, starting at verse 7.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushon, Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushon, Rishatham, eight years. But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel, the son of Kinnaz, Caleb's younger brother.

The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord gave Cushon, Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushon, Rishatham.

[ 4 : 04 ] So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel, the son of Kinnaz, died. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for what you have been teaching us in this book, and we ask that you would continue to teach us, that you, like a good and faithful Father, would instruct us, that you would show us the reality of our own hearts, which are tempted to stray. But you would show us even more the great love and power that you exercise towards your people and for your people. We ask that you, most of all, would show us this in your Son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus. And we ask that you would unstop our ears, that you would open our eyes, that you would clear our minds, and that you would soften our hearts, that we would be able to see and hear and understand and believe everything that you've written in your Word. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I would say it's maybe 20 years ago I started to notice what I now consider to be a pretty tired trope, which is that whenever we have a president, no matter what party he's in, there is someone who finds some way to take some poll to say, this is the worst president we've ever had.

Okay, and I think this has been going on for about 20 years now. So if it's a Democrat, the Republicans find a group of people they can poll who are willing to say, this is the worst that's ever happened. Okay, and then if it's a Republican, the Democrats do that, and back and forth. And it's just actually not possible for the last four or five presidents we've had to be the worst in the history of the country, right? Because worst means there's only one. We can't just keep doing this.

It gets to a point where it gets tired. And so I see these things, and I've been watching this for decades now, and I just roll my eyes. I am going to tell you something, though, that is not a lie.

Now, 10 out of 10 Israelites agree. Ophniel is the best judge. He is the best judge that Israel gets to have in this book. And I can tell you that with confidence because of the principle that I've already reminded of you. From last week, verse 19, things became more corrupt with every cycle. The Israelites did not give up their stubborn ways.

[ 6 : 46 ] And so that is the way the book is laid out. We start out with Ophniel here. He's the model judge, the best judge. Nothing bad is said about him. And then we're going to end with Samson, the worst judge. So the book is laid out from best to worst. That helps us understand how we're meant to read this. We start off in verse 7, and we find a phrase that should be familiar at this point.

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. That's the exact same phrase we saw in chapter 2, verse 11, when it told us about the entire cycle. So this is saying, okay, remember we said this is what's going to happen for the cycle. Now it's our first cycle. And if you look ahead, if you have your Bible and you look in verse 12, which we'll cover soon, it says the same thing.

The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So we are starting the cycle, the spiral that we've been told about. And this is going to serve as a key phrase over and over in the book that tells us, okay, Israel is doing the same thing over again. There are going to be many iterations. This just happens to be the first iteration. And we quickly see the pattern continues.

It's not just that they do evil, but as we already know, verse 8, the anger of the Lord's kindled against them. He sells them into the hand of Cush and Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia. And as we were told last week, what do they do? Verse 9, they cry out. But you'll remember from last week, they don't cry out in repentance. We're not told that Israel turns away from their wicked ways. No, they're just tired of this foreign ruler being over them. And that's what we were told in verse 18. Remember, God last week takes mercy on them, not because of their repentance, but because he hears their groaning.

So at this point, simply review. Everything we saw in the overview from last week is true. They do what's evil in the sight of the Lord. God hands them over because of his anger. Then they cry out, God comes to redeem. And that's where we begin to see God's ultimate control.

[ 9 : 05 ]     Nowhere in this story does God lift his hand from Israel. Nowhere is God's plan thwarted. In fact, you've probably noticed God is the main actor in this story. Verse 8, what happens?

God sold them into the hand of Cush and Rishatham. Think about that. Giving us this image of God allowed this man to pay him money, not literally, right? And he hands his people over. And so God's in control of the fact that Israel is under this oppressive ruler. And then verses 7 and 8 remind us of the principle we're going to see over and over in the book of Judges, and we've already seen, which is that the punishment fits the crime. Verse 7, they serve the Baals. And so what happens? Verse 8, they serve this bad king. Oh, you're going to worship foreign gods? Well, then I'll let you be oppressed by foreign kings. You can't have half the package.

You're going to get the full package. The punishment fits the crime. It's not just, though, that God is in charge of selling them. God is also in charge of saving them. Verse 9, when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer who saved the people. And so what I want you to see is this. Why did it take eight years for a deliverer to be raised up? It took eight years for a deliverer to be raised up because God decided it was going to take eight years. God sold them. God raised up a deliverer. Yes, it is true. They cried out, right? That is maybe a secondary answer. The primary answer is that God is in complete control. It started when God wanted it to start. It ended when God wanted it to end. God is sovereignly arranging the rulers and the history of this world for the good of his people.

Now, here we see him doing it as an act of discipline, right? We saw last week that God is testing his people. Here he's doing it to draw them back to him, to bring them back to him. But we can say the same thing about all of the events we see around the world. Why do certain things last for two years?

Because God decided they were going to last for two years. Why do other things last for five years? Because God decided they were going to last for five years. The name, by the way, Rishatham, this second name that he has, this is actually not his birth name because Rishatham means double wicked or doubly wicked.

[ 12 : 13 ]     So this is some kind of nickname they had for this guy. He's so bad, he's not just wicked one time, he's wicked two times. He's double wicked, okay? If you feel like you are under the rule in whatever sphere of someone who is doubly wicked, remember God is still in control.

God decides when it starts and he decides when it ends. God numbers the days, every single one.

God sold them into the hand of this foreign leader. God raised up a deliverer. Of course, that's where we also see God's control, his sovereignty. It's not just his control over these eight years where they have to suffer under this doubly wicked man. We also see God's the one who's at work bringing their salvation. Othniel's faithfulness. Remember, I told you he's the model judge. Ten out of ten Israelites agree that Othniel is the best judge they've ever had.

Othniel's faithfulness matters. It is necessary. It is not sufficient. Othniel is not powerful enough to save Israel on his own. In fact, what we see here is Othniel ultimately is just an instrument in God's hands. His deliverance is undergirded. It's supported by what God is doing. It is actually God's power and strength at work. Remember verse nine, the Lord raised up a deliverer. God was at work in Othniel's life. God prepared Othniel as a person to take on this role. God arranged the events, whatever they were, that Othniel ended up in this position. God raised him up. Even more than that, verse 10, the spirit of the Lord was upon him.

Othniel was not competent by himself to save God's people. Othniel's gifts were not enough.

[ 14 : 44 ] He had to have God's anointing. He had to have God's spirit at work in his life. Remember, I've been telling you there's three things that we see in the book of Judges. We see the need for constant renewal and revival, and we see the power of spirit-enabled leadership. What is Othniel if not a spirit-enabled leader? And that's the same pattern. Last week, remember, when we were told how the cycle was going to work, verse 18 said this, whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge. Verse 9, God raised him up. Verse 10, the spirit of the Lord was with him.

And verse 10 again, the Lord gave Cush and Rishathaim into his hand. So watch the sequence here. First, this is in verse 10. First, the Lord gave him into his hand. That's what we're told. Second, and his hand prevailed. Why did Othniel win? Because God decided Othniel was going to win. Why did Othniel win? Because God's spirit was with him. How was Israel saved? God raised up a judge.

Yes, Othniel is faithful, and his true faithfulness is allowing himself to be used by God. Christian, your faithfulness matters as God by his spirit uses you to accomplish his purposes.

Your faithfulness matters as God uses you by his spirit as his instrument to accomplish his purposes. Aside from the Lord, Othniel is nothing.

God at work establishes our work. It is God who's at work who establishes our work.

[ 17 : 06 ] We're told the same thing in Psalm 127. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Christian, your hope and your only hope is that God is at work.

True for Othniel, and it is true for us. Now, that being said, Othniel's faithfulness matters a lot.

His faithfulness matters tremendously, and we've actually already met him before. This is not the first time he showed up in the book of Judges. He has served before, and he serves now, as an example of faithfulness in the midst of unfaithful Israel.

If you remember all the way back to chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, I just spent a minute talking about this, but you'll remember Caleb had a daughter. And you'll remember that Caleb wanted his daughter to end up with a courageous man of God.

[ 18 : 28 ] In other words, Caleb was avoiding the result, what happened for most of Israel as we looked at several weeks ago. Most of Israel, their faith did not pass on to the next generation. What did Caleb say to himself?

Most likely, he said, look, I am a man of courage. I take cities, and I'm faithful to God. What kind of man do I want my daughter, Oxa, to be with? Well, I want her to be with a man who's faithful, who trusts God, and takes cities.

So what does he do? He says, whoever takes Kiri of Sether can have my daughter as his wife. Do you remember who took Kiri of Sether? Othniel.

Othniel was faithful in trusting God when the rest of Israel was unsure. Othniel did not forget God's power in the past, and Othniel did not fail to remember and trust God's promises for the present and the future.

Othniel is a faithful man in the midst of an unfaithful people. And so God uses him. He uses his faithfulness.

[ 19 : 37 ] Not only do we see his faithfulness in taking that city, we also see his faithfulness in marrying Oxa. How did things end in the last passage, the last two verses last week?

Chapter 3, verses 5 and 6 told us two things. First, they were intermarrying with these other nations. What did that intermarriage result in? Last phrase, they served their gods.

Israel was unfaithful. Part of their unfaithfulness was marrying those who did not follow the Lord. What happened when they married those who did not follow the Lord was that they ended up serving other gods.

Not so for Othniel. Othniel is faithful, and so God honors his faithfulness and uses him in a powerful way.

God, being at work, establishes our work. Othniel has no hope outside of the Spirit of God. And he is used by the Spirit of God as God looks on his faithfulness and blesses it.

[ 20 : 53 ] Christian, your obedience matters. What we need in the book of Judges is faithful leaders. Othniel chooses to walk in the ways of the Lord when no one else does.

He chooses to take God at his word when the rest of Israel is unsure. That's what he did in chapter 1.

That's what he did here. That is what God calls us to as well. To take him at his word. To believe his promises. And to act in faith no matter what is happening around us.

In verse 9, it tells us what this joy for Othniel looks like. It says, And so the way the ESV translates it here, it's saying that Othniel saved them.

Right? He raised up a deliverer. That deliverer saved them. It's actually ambiguous in the Hebrew. We do not know what the antecedent of who is. The Hebrew set up, so we're not sure if it's saying the Lord saved them or Othniel saved them.

[ 22 : 17 ] And so who did it? The answer is yes. Othniel is so aligned with God's purposes.

He's so faithful to God's word that he has the joy of merging in with God and his work in the world.

Was it God or Othniel who saved Israel? Yes. That, brothers and sisters, is the joy of obedience.

Othniel has the joy of being aligned with God and he has the joy of being used by God. Not because he is great, but he has faith in a great God.

And so the point simply is this. God chooses to work through the faith of his people. God chooses to work through the obedience of his people.

[ 23 : 27 ] God will work through someone. Will he work through you? Will you remember God's power in the past?

Will you trust his promises for the present and the future? God uses our obedience as his great instrument in passing on the faith to the next generation.

God uses your work as a teacher, as his tool to shape people who reflect his image in the world. God uses your diligence as a soldier, as his mighty arm, to keep the wicked far away from the innocent.

God uses your faithfulness in changing diapers as his means of showing his love to the least of these.

God uses your courage as his voice to share the gospel with your neighbors. And so we can say in a certain sense, be like Othniel as he trusts God.

[ 25 : 01 ] Be like Othniel as he takes God at his word, a man of faith and courage and obedience. God is at work in your work as you trust him and obey him.

God is at work through your work as you trust him in obedience. God, by his Holy Spirit, makes your work greater than the sum of its parts.

God is at work in between. There is no doubt about God's grace and obedience in obedience. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

And so, Christian, the point for us is very simple. trust the promises of God. Act in obedience no matter what.

God is at work in your work. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

[ 26 : 18 ] I mentioned earlier that I tell you three things at the beginning of Judges, and then I only reminded you of the first two. First one, need for constant revival and renewal among God's people.

Second one, the power of spirit-enabled leadership, which is what we see in Othniel. Third, 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.

Because we leave this story on a sad note. Verse 11, the land had rest for 40 years. On the one hand, great news.

You've got rest for 40 years. On the other hand, terrible news. It's only going to last for 40 years. Half a generation. No matter how faithful Othniel is, God's people need something more.

God's people need a king who can bring them not rest for 40 years. God's people need a king who can bring them rest forever.

[ 27 : 28 ] God's people need a king who can bring him eternal rest. Othniel is the model judge, and he is not enough.

And so that's why we look forward from the Old Testament, and we look forward to our Lord Jesus in the New Testament, who comes not to bring rest for 40 years, but to bring rest forever.

Who comes and lives a perfect life on this earth, lives the life that we should have lived, takes the penalty for our sin and dies the death that we should have died, and promises us in John chapter 14 to pour out his Holy Spirit on to his people.

He has given us victory now as we see the defeat of the enemy and of sin, and we will experience that victory fully and finally one day.

The land will not have rest for 40 years. The land will have rest forever. That's our hope and our Lord and our Savior.

[ 28 : 43 ] And so we obey him, we trust him, and we wait for him. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you that you have not left us, but you do send your spirit as Jesus promised in John 14.

You provide leaders who are faithful in leading your people. You ask that you would use us as your instruments, not because we've earned it or deserved it, but be of you delight to give your spirit to your people, that you would move us to greater and greater trust in you in your power and your promises.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Amen. The gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer.

There is no more for heaven not to give. He is my joy, my righteousness and freedom, my steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace.

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus, for my life is wholly bound to peace.

[ 30 : 18 ] Oh, how strange and divine I can sing, all is mine, yet not I, but through Christ.