

Taking God at His Word

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[0 : 0 0] 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.

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 become convinced 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. Just a couple weeks ago, after about two years, we wrapped up our series in the Gospel of Mark, and the practice at our church is to change between Old Testament and New Testament to switch off every other series, and so now we're headed into the Old Testament. And as I've mentioned a few times, we're going to be looking at the book of Judges. The book of Judges is about many things. Some of the things it's about include this. It's about the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people. The book is about our need for a faithful and true king, a king who can do what no human king can do, a king who's able to change the hearts of people. And we're also going to see what happens when there are leaders among God's people who lead with God's Spirit and lead in dependence on him. Of course, there's much more that we could say about the book of Judges, but we're going to jump right in this morning. I'm going to invite you to turn with me to Judges chapter 1. Now, I haven't done this maybe since 2019 when we were in the book of Nehemiah. You'll remember when we were in the book of Nehemiah that we would sometimes read a whole chapter at a time. And so I would acknowledge, hey, sometimes it can be hard in church to pay attention to a whole chapter being read at once. And so I would give you an assignment. I have an assignment for you this morning. As you look at it, so that you're not easily distracted, I want you again to track a phrase with me. I want you to track how many times you see the phrase, not drive out. Now, it could have some other words around it. It might say, not drive them out. In some places, it might just say, not drive out. But where you see, not drive out. If you have a pencil or a pen, maybe you can underline it. I want you to count and see if you can track all of the things. Because as we've talked about in the past, when the Bible teaches us, especially in the Old Testament, repetition is extremely important.

And so it's with that, I am going to invite you to turn with me. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. 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 together now, starting at Judges 1, verse 1. After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the Lord, who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?

The Lord said, Judah shall go up. Behold, I have given the land into his hand. And Judah said to Simeon his brother, Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you. So Simeon went with him. Verse 4. Then Judah went up, and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek.

[3 : 34] They found Adonai Bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Adonai Bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. And Adonai Bezek said, Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my table. As I have done, so God has repaid me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there. Verse 8. And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. And afterward, the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country in the Negev and in the low land. And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in the Hebron. Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath Arba, and they defeated Sheshai and Ahaman and Talmai. Verse 11. From there, they went against the inhabitants of Debtor. The name of Debtor was formerly Kiriath-sephir. And Caleb said, He who attacks

Kiriath-sephir and captures it, I will give him Oxa, my daughter, for a wife. And Ophniel, the son of Kenes, Caleb's younger brother, captured it. And he gave him Oxa, his daughter, for a wife. When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, What do you want? She said to him, Give me a blessing. Since you have set me in the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water. And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

Verse 16. And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of Palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negev near Arad. And they went and settled with the people. And Judah went with Simeon, his brother, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and devoted it to destruction. So the name of the city was called Hormah. Judah also captured Gaza with its territory, and Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country. But he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron. And Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said, and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem. So the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord was with them.

And the house of Joseph scouted out Bethel. Now the name of the city was formerly Luz. And the spies saw a man coming out of the city, and they said to him, Please show us the way into the city, and we will deal kindly with you. And he showed them the way into the city. And they struck the city with the edge of the sword, but they let the man and all his family go. And the man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city and called its name Luz. That is its name to this day. Verse 27. Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and its villages, or Tannic and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Iblum and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, for the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not drive them out completely. And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalul, so the Canaanites lived among them, but became subject to forced labor. Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Akko, or the inhabitants of Sidan, or of Ahlab, or of Ahzib, or of Helba, or of Afik, or of Rehob. So the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. Verse 33. Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath, so they lived among the

Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and of Beth Anath became subject to forced labor for them. The Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the plain. The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heraz in Ejalon and in Shalbam, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor. And the border of the Amorites ran from the ascent of Akrabim, from Selah, and upward. Chapter 2. Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochum, and he said, I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give your fathers.

[8 : 36] I said, I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land. You shall break down their altars, but you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?

So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a sneer to you. As soon as the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the people of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept. And they called the name of that place, Bochum, and they sacrificed there to the Lord. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you speak to us clearly in your Word. You speak to us not just through the New Testament, but also through the Old Testament, that we see your Son and our Savior, our Lord Jesus, from the very beginning of Scripture all the way to the very end. We thank you for what you've reminded us of in 2 Peter chapter 1, that you have precious and very great promises that we can hold on to and cling to. We ask that you would remind us of those this morning, and that you would help us to understand your Word, and most of all, you'd help us to see Jesus Christ. We'd understand His love for us and His provision for us, and we'd follow Him with faith and obedience. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's been quite some time now since we've been in the Old Testament. The last time we were there was, I believe, 2021, when we finished the book of Daniel. And so it's important just to remember where we are right now in the story of the Old Testament. If you're familiar with the story of the Old Testament, you know we start in Genesis, and we move quickly to the patriarchs. We have Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Joseph ends up taking God's people into Egypt, and in Egypt, they end up becoming slaves for 400 years. Then God delivers them out of Egypt. They wander in the desert for 40 years, and after that point, God brings them into the Promised Land. It's the book of Joshua, which comes right before the book of Judges, that tells about God's people entering the Promised Land and the beginning of their conquest of the Promised Land. So where we are right now, and you may have noticed this, chapter 1, verse 1, Joshua dies. So it is the end of the beginning of God's people settling the

Promised Land, but they have not finished settling the land. So that's why you see in verse 1, who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them. So the goal of God's people at this point, this is the mission that God's given them, to go into Canaan, the land that God promised them when they left Egypt, and to clear it of the other nations who would tempt them to worship other gods. So big picture, here's where we are in the story of the Old Testament. We are after Israel has been saved from Egypt after their wandering in the desert. We are before the time of the kings. So we're after wandering in the desert. We're before Saul comes in as the first king of Israel. And that period in between is the period of the Judges. It's important for us to know that and know the history of what's come before in the book of Joshua, because if we do, then we know the job that Israel has in here. And God repeats this again through his angel in chapter 2. The job that Israel has is to clear the Promised Land of the Pagan Nations. They are supposed to completely drive them out. That's what starts in the book of Joshua. That's what's supposed to be finished in the book of Judges. It's that background that helps us to understand kind of the big picture of what we've looked at in all of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. And the big picture is this, that their obedience is partial at best. The obedience of God's people in obeying his command to take the Promised Land is partial at best. Now, things start out overall pretty good. Judah is chosen as the tribe that is meant to go up first. And things are mostly good with Judah's conquest. This is, say, verses 1 through 19, essentially. However, we have just even a small hint at the very beginning. What does God tell his people?

He says, I want Judah to go. I'm going to be with them. What does Judah say? Hey, verse 3, Simeon, how about you come along and party with us? And if you come and fight with us, we'll go back and fight with you. Except God did not say for Judah and Simeon to go. God said for Judah to go.

[13 : 38] In other words, even at the very beginning, Judah decides, you know what? We know God's promise and he's with us. He's got that power and that presence we've heard about. But let's take some insurance just in case. Let's have a backup plan just in case God doesn't come through. And so it's not, you know, it's not the end of the world. We see worse things in the chapter. But we're given a small hint here. Even at the beginning, there's this question, is God actually going to do what he said he's going to do? Is he going to keep his word? Is he actually powerful enough to drive out the nations? Is his presence enough for Judah? Or do we need to bring in some other allies, you know, just in case? I mean, maybe God's going to have a bad day when we're fighting against the Canaanites.

And Simeon can come and kind of shore us up and that will bring us over the top. Now, things are mostly good with Judah. We have a few interesting stories. We have Adonai Bezek, who gets his toes and his big toe and his thumbs chopped off. That reminds us of the Old Testament principle that the punishment fits the crime, something he himself understands. He said, I've done it to 70 other people, so it makes sense that I have it done to me. And then we have this quick story about Aksa, who is the daughter of Caleb. Caleb, remember, is one of the only two Israelites who remained faithful in taking the promised land. This takes us back to Numbers chapter 14.

So Caleb and Joshua are kind of the premier leaders of Israel, the ones who believed God's promises when no one else believed them. And so they're the only ones in that generation who get to enter the promised land. That's why there's the wandering in the desert for 40 years. That whole other generation dies off except for Caleb and Joshua. So Caleb, Joshua, we see the end of him at the beginning of the chapter. Caleb here, it's supposed, wants his daughter to end up with a man like him.

He's a strong and valiant warrior who believes God's promises. And so he says, look, here's what I want. I want a man for my daughter who is strong and valiant and believes God's promises. And so whoever is willing to go out and do what God's commanded, they are going to receive her as their wife. We learn quickly that this is a phenomenal deal for that man because Aksa is a force multiplier.

She understands the importance of water rights, something we understand all too well in Colorado. Verse 15, she says, look, you're going to give us this land. We need some water as well. And then she's kind of behind the scenes telling her husband, hey, you need to go ask for more things.

[16:08] We're not told whether he acts on his wife's advice. I won't spend too much time talking about Aksa except to say we're going to see this later throughout the book of Judges. This lays the foundation of the fact that over and over what we're going to see, a variety of wise and powerful women.

And just like in the time of Judges, we still need wise and powerful women today. Now, those are some bright spots in what is mostly a dark chapter. Things start small and they get worse as the chapter goes on. They are especially bad in verse 19. And this, by the way, was the first time you saw those three words, not drive out. And the Lord was with Judah and he took possession of the hill country, but he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron. Now, I just read to you two statements that can't be true at the same time.

Verse 19, God was with them and they could not drive them out. Either God was with them or they could not drive them out. Those things cannot both be true.

And in fact, God says as much through his angel later on in chapter two. One man has said this is written as if it's a press report from the Israelites trying to defend their actions. And so when they say could not drive them out, there's perhaps a little bit more going on than that. And we see right after it, Caleb kind of beats the odds, right? Verse 19, they can't drive out because of the chariots, but Caleb's able to take Hebron and he drives out from it the three sons of Anak. And so we see Judah as a tribe overall, failing in faithfulness to God and Caleb remaining strong as he always has. Verse 19, though, is just the beginning.

Verse 21, the people of Benjamin will not drive them out. And then in verses 27 through 36, we have this absolute cascade of failure. And this is where if you were marking, you're just having to constantly mark phrases. Okay, how many not drive outs did you find?

[18:23] Yeah, I have a list. I could be wrong, but I have a list of 10. And here's where I have them. Verses 19, 21, once for every verse, 27 through 32. And then it shows up finally in that sobering statement in verse 3 of chapter 2. God says, you did not drive out, so I will not drive out.

So the author of Judges is telling us over and over, he wants to make it crystal clear. Beginning things started out okay, at the end they fell apart. And why did they fall apart? Because God's people did not obey His word.

Now we don't have to wonder why. We actually have another hint. Not drive out appears 10 times. We have another phrase that appears four times in that section, which is this.

They put them to forced labor. What's going on? People of Israel have decided that they are slightly wiser than God.

God has told them to drive these people out. But that's actually not the best strategy. And here's why it's not the best strategy. If we drive these people out, they will not be able to provide us with free labor.

[19:35] The economy will not be booming if we do what God has commanded. It actually makes, I mean, we understand what the priests are trying to say, but they are so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly good.

They don't understand the reality on the ground. I mean, look, we've got this land to capture. We've got to cultivate it. Of course we need to put these people to forced labor. Yeah, we know that technically what God said was to drive them out.

Okay, but let's face the reality on the ground. Reality on the ground is we need to put them to forced labor. That actually makes a lot more sense. We know what God said, but let's be practical.

We're not actually going to give up all these people who can do all this work for us. And so the point is this. As one man has said, pragmatism is the opposite of faith.

Pragmatism is the opposite of faith. And it's the opposite of faith, as he explains for this reason. Pragmatism operates only based on what we can see.

[20 : 48] Pragmatism operates only based on what we can see. Pragmatism leaves no room for God to act. Pragmatism has a earthly perspective.

It has no heavenly perspective. Pragmatism believes it is up to what I can do right now, not what God can do in his power. And so pragmatism excludes at the very beginning the option that maybe God might intervene.

Maybe he might do something supernatural to honor our obedience. Maybe God is wiser than we are. And so doing the practical thing often leads to a world of compromise and unbelief.

That's the trajectory we see in Judges chapter 1. They choose to do the sensible thing rather than the right thing.

They do what makes sense to them, not what God has instructed. And so what are we to make of all of that?

[21 : 57] Well, we have sort of an earthly interpretation in chapter 1. And we get a heavenly perspective in chapter 2.

Eventually, for all things, rent comes due. And rent comes due for Israel when the angel of the Lord shows up. Chapter 2, verse 1. And he reminds them of two things.

He reminds them of God's command. And he reminds them of their disobedience. Verse 2. You shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land.

You shall break down their altars. But you have not obeyed my voice. And so that's where we have this sobering quote on page 9 of your worship guide, which contrasts the story that the Israelites tell in verse 19 from God's statement in verse 2 here.

We read the Israelites were unable. Chapter 2, verse 2 is a flat contradiction of this claim. Essentially, the Israelites said we could not. And God answers here, you would not.

[23 : 09] I gave you a command. You failed to obey. The angel just doesn't tell them that, though. Before he points out God's command and their disobedience, he shares something else with them.

Look back at verse 1. He reminds them of God's faithfulness in the past. I brought you up from Egypt.

And he reminds them of God's promise for the present and the future. I will never break my covenant with you. God reminds them of his faithfulness in the past.

I brought you out of Egypt. And he reminds them of his promises for the present and the future. I will not break my covenant with you. Not only did I give you my word, not only did I tell you my covenant would be unbroken, but I'd already showed you how powerful I was.

It wasn't just words. You already saw me free you from Egypt. It wasn't just words. You've already seen the ten plagues that I brought upon the Egyptians.

[24 : 27] It wasn't just words you saw when I parted the Red Sea. It wasn't just words you saw me bring you into this land. I will not break my covenant with you.

I delivered you out of Egypt. And what have you done? They've forgotten the lesson of Caleb and Joshua from Numbers chapter 14.

God told them to take the promised land. Only Caleb and Joshua were willing to do it. And here the same cycle repeats again. And so what's happening in Judges at the beginning is very simple.

Israel has failed to remember God's power in the past. Israel has failed to remember God's promises for the present and the future. Israel has failed to remember God's power in the past.

And they have failed to remember his promises for the present and the future. God's people have refused to take God at his word. They assessed the situation only by what made sense on the ground.

[25 : 39] They looked at only what was practical. They only were concerned with what made sense financially. And so we might say that they failed to act on Psalm 20 verse 7.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses. But we trust in the name of the Lord our God. Israel had too much in the chariots and horses bucket and too little in the name of the Lord our God bucket.

And so for us, the reminder and challenge is this, that we have to trust in God's power and his promises. What is this passage teaching us?

It is teaching us how important it is to take God at his word. We look to what he has done in the past and we know what kind of power he has.

We look at his promises for the future so that we can obey. Remember, we have already read this.

[26 : 58] 2 Peter 1 verse 4, he has precious and very great promises. How is Israel supposed to obey him? How are we supposed to obey God today?

It's by remembering his power and believing his promises. It means that when we are tempted to compromise, to appease or please our family, we remember God's promise in Psalm 27 verse 10.

For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in. When we are tempted to give up the fight and we believe that everything is all over, we remember God's promise to us in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 10.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. It means that when society seems to be crumbling around us and we're tempted with poor choices and poor words, we remember God's promise in Psalm 46.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear that the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.

[28 : 27] It means that we remember God's promise in Revelation chapter 21 verse 4 that he's going to wipe away every tear from our eyes and death shall be no more.

It means if you're unsure of whether your faith can survive tragedy, you remember God's promise in Psalm 34 verse 18 that he's near to the brokenhearted and he saves the crushed in spirit.

And it means that when you are faced with challenges on every side, unsure of which way to go, and tempted to do something rash or foolish, you remember God's promise in James chapter 1 verse 5.

He gives wisdom to those who ask. Brothers and sisters, God has given us his precious and very great promises.

And so we must take him at his word. It means that when we're tempted to give up and stop fighting sin, we're reminded of God's promise to us.

[29 : 42] In Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, for I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It means that when we are tempted to deny our Savior so that we don't have to risk a smaller salary or fewer friends, we remember his promise in Matthew chapter 5.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

Now the people of Israel here, they knew God's promise. His promise we're reminded of in verse 1. I will never break my covenant with you. And Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 20 that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus Christ.

How much more of a reason then do we have to believe and trust? Yes, Israel in the Old Testament had seen God's power when he rescued them from Egypt.

Christian, you have seen God's power when Christ rescued you, not from slavery to Egypt, but from slavery to sin. You have seen God's power, not in the parting of the Red Sea, but in raising a dead man to life.

[31 : 19] You have seen God's mercy, not from provision of food in the wilderness, but providing his one and only son to be a sacrifice for us.

All the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. And of course we have the promise we're given in Romans chapter 8 verse 32 where Paul tells us, if he gave you his son, will he not with him give you all things?

Brothers and sisters, how do we follow God when the practical thing is very different? We do it because we remember God's power in the past, his power most of all shown in his redemption in Christ, and we remember the promises he has given that he's guaranteed to us in the present and in the future.

And so that's why we're able to stand and sing, when the woes of life overtake me, hopes deceive and fears annoy. Never shall the cross forsake me.

It glows with peace and joy. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you have given us your word.

[32 : 45] You've reminded us of what's true when we're tempted with lies and unbelief. And we ask that you would remind us this morning of your great power, that you are stronger than anyone and anything else, and of your promises.

Scriptures tell us that if we are faithless, you remain faithful, for you cannot deny yourself. We ask that that would strengthen us and motivate us, that we would follow you with joy and faith.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.