

July 23, 2023

“A Relationship with the LORD” Judges 10:1-18

FCF: Uncertainty about “a relationship” with God

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The LORD calls us into relationship with Him.

(magnet) This demands a turning from sin.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

What does it mean when someone says, “We are in a relationship?” Typically, that means they are in a committed, long-term arrangement with someone, usually romantic. That’s usually what they mean. One thing of note. It can be exhilarating to hear someone say that of you. That is, when they say to others of you, or in some way even say to you, “We are in a relationship.”

What if God said that of you? What if He said that to you? “We are in a relationship.” What would that mean? We are moving through this series in the book of Judges. This is the time between the exodus and the monarchy, between Moses and David. These are the years of settlement and conquest of the Promised Land, the making of a nation. And it was really messy.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Judges 10:1-18](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

A fellow pastor and I were discussing “pre-marital counseling” the other day. It’s always appropriate. And hopefully helpful. Typical topics are money, sex, in-laws, communication, and roles. Also the nature of the relationship. That is, marriage is not a contract. It is a covenant. It is meant to be permanent, exclusive, and exhaustive - not tiring but a sharing of the whole life.

The Bible tells us that the relationship between God and His people is much like this, much like a marriage - permanent, exclusive, and exhaustive. There are parallels, ways in which they are alike. That said, there are differences too, ways in which these two relationships are not alike. God is the one who takes all the initiative. There is no sharing of that. He alone sets the tone. He alone establishes the parameters. To fail to live out of that is to do ourselves harm.

We see reflections of this all through Scripture, and no less so in Judges 10. Pressing into this passage reminds us of some essentials, the dynamics to this relationship that exists between God and His people still today. He is still the one who takes the initiative, sets the tone, and establishes the parameters. If I can put it this way, God calls us into relationship with Himself. The LORD calls us into relationship with Himself. What does this demand? A turning from sin.

How do we see this need to turn from sin? How is that borne out? In three ways. First, in His consternation with us. Second, in His intentions for us. Third, in His compassion for us.

I. HIS CONSTERNATION WITH US

First, we see this need to turn from sin in His consternation with us. I know that sounds rough. But it’s clearly evident. Jesus expressed this toward His disciples ([READ Mark 7:18a](#)).

A) His Great Salvation

There are two things worth noting - God’s great salvation and our great rebellion.

1. What He did

Thinking of this salvation (**READ Judges 10:11-12**). They cried out. And He delivered them.

2. How it is described

But note how this salvation is described. Seven nations, seven oppressors, are listed. Now this was real. But “seven” often implies completion, a totality. This was an utterly full deliverance.

B) Their Great Rebellion

Shifting from God’s great salvation, let’s consider their great rebellion. What do we see?

1. What they did

Pay careful attention to the verbs in v.6 (**READ Judges 10:6**). It’s pretty awful, pretty thorough.

2. How it is described

And again, we have these seven nations. It was real but there is more being communicated. Yes, there had been an utter full deliverance but then an utterly full dissolution and disregard for the LORD. The narrator is making clear Israel was serving every god they could. But the LORD.

Which then results in what? (**READ Judges 10:7-8a**) The LORD sold His people - not by disowning them but in giving over to what they wanted. You see the tension, the consternation.

Illustration:

In our discussion last week in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, one of the questions we kicked around was, “Who is the villain? Who is the enemy?” In the first book, it was the evil White Witch. In the second, it was King Miraz, a traitorous tyrant. But what of the third? The villain, the enemy here, is within. We see it in the temptations and the heart exposing that brings.

Application:

That’s true of us in our own story. Judges 10 is our story. How does that land on you? It ought to be sobering. It may not be what you want to hear. But it may be the right medicine.

Such a thought is sobering. But also encouraging. For we see that we are on God’s radar. We are on His screen. We register with Him. We matter to Him. We are clearly on His heart.

His consternation points us to a relationship with Him. This demands a turning to Him.

II. HIS INTENTIONS FOR US

Which brings us to the part of the reason for His consternation - His intentions for us. He made us for more - to be united to His purposes, not to our selfish interests and trivial pursuits.

A) Their Wayward Hearts

We see this in a couple of ways here. Note the waywardness of the people’s hearts.

1. Stuck in a cycle

They were stuck in a cycle, repeating and worsening. They were drawn by the promises of idols, of lesser gods. They were looking to and living for things other than the true God. Which works much like an addiction - consuming, entrapping, ensnaring. Driving you deeper into the pit.

2. Unable to see

And they couldn't see it. Their repentance was only on the surface (READ Judges 10:10). Yes, they were sorry but only for the suffering and consequences of their sin, but not the sin itself.

B) *His Steadfast Self*

Their fickleness then collided with the LORD's faithfulness, His steadfast self.

1. Not impressed

He was not impressed with their words (READ Judges 10:13-14). He is not a vending machine or a clerk behind a counter. He is not one from whom we demand a product or a certain result.

2. Presses in

God was not impressed. And so He presses in. He had heard all this before. He had heard their right words from a wrong heart. They wanted relief from the pain. But they did not want Him.

The LORD has intentions for His people. Which means He will not be manipulated.

Illustration:

Back to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, there is a conversation that touches on this. Lucy has just accomplished a harrowing task, freeing the natives of this island from a spell. She and Coriakin, the wizard, are talking with Aslan who states he is now about to depart (READ):

"Do not look sad. We shall meet soon again."

"Please, Aslan", said Lucy, "what do you call soon?"

"I call all times soon" said Aslan; and instantly he was vanished away.

"Gone!" said he, "and you and I quite cress-fallen. It's always like that, you can't keep him; it's not as if he were a *tame* lion."

Application:

The LORD is no tame god. He cannot be controlled, manipulated. He is not our advisor, consultant, or supplier-on-demand. Here's a thought experiment. In prayer with God, you make your request. "I have served you. I have sacrificed for you, denied myself, endured hardship, and done all the right things. And now I need THIS." But when THIS doesn't come, what do you do? If you become embittered, cynical, and walk away, what does that show? The chief end of your life was THAT. God was but a means towards THAT. It's not supposed to be that way.

In this relationship, the LORD has intentions for us. This demands this turning to Him.

III. HIS AFFECTIONS FOR US

Which brings us to our third point, His affections for us. His love cannot just let us go.

A) *Their Helplessness*

We see this in a couple of striking ways. Starting with our astonishing helplessness.

1. A needed turning

The people eventually turn in a real heartfelt way (READ Judges 10:15-16a). They are sorry for their sin, were willing to go beyond and beneath the surface, digging out the roots, their idols.

2. But not the cause

And that was good. But note that this was not the cause for the LORD's mercy (READ Judges 10:15-16). Literally, "his soul became short." He could bear Israel's suffering no more.

B) *His Graciousness*

Their misery made Him miserable. Their helplessness led to His graciousness.

1. Note the minor judges

We see this at the beginning of the chapter with the account of the minor judges. We're told they had to be saved. From whom? There were no invaders. It was from themselves and the chaos of Abimelech, the bramble king. They hadn't even cried out to the LORD. Yet He saved them.

2. Hear His groaning

Hear the groaning of our Savior (**READ Judges 10:16**). This is the kind of impatience we need. It's what we have. He cannot stand to see His people suffer but for so long - even for our sin.

Such is the depth, the astonishing depth, of our Savior's affection for us.

Illustration:

I'm reminded of Hosea. The LORD called Hosea to marry a woman who would prove to be unfaithful. And not just that, he was to seek her out, to woo her back. Why? As an acted out living parable of the LORD's own experience and passion for His people (**READ Hosea 11:8-9**).

Application:

We need to reckon with this. Our repentance will never be enough. But the LORD's love will. We need to be settled with both sides of that. Our repentance will never be enough. But the LORD's love will. That is our security. That is our hope. That is our peace and consolation.

(**READ Judges 10:17-18**) "Who is man?" Jephthah, the next judge. But ultimately, that man who will fight for and be head over the people will be Jesus, the greater Judge to come. And how much more can we know that on this side of the cross? How much more reason do we have, how much more freedom do we have, to turn to Him because of knowing that great love?

The LORD calls us into relationship with Him. This means a turning from sin.

CONCLUSION:

C. S. Lewis wrote on more than just Narnia. In his book, *The Problem of Pain* (**READ**):

We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the "intolerable compliment." Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.

The point? In the best possible sense, God is never satisfied with where we are. That is quite an intolerable compliment. But there is another. He is never unmoved by our response to Him.

That hardly seems plausible. God is infinite, eternal, unchangeable. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. He is the Creator. We are but creatures. We are nowhere close to any of those things. And yet we have His heart. We have His heart. And He wants ours.

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