

Anarchy and Misplaced Motivations

Judges 17

Ron Smith

September 14, 2008

River of Life Church

Introduction

When I was in Bible College, part of my practical training involved going to the prison to minister to inmates once a week. It was a very rewarding experience in a lot of ways. But it could also be frustrating at times. One of the things that frustrated me was the number of people who would tell me “I didn't do it” or “it's not my fault” for being in prison.

I even see it in my own children. The other day Josiah was crying in the back room. Winsor comes out and says “Josiah fell.” When Amy goes back to the room, Josiah says, “Winsor kicked me off the bed.” Of course her response was not, “I am so sorry.” Rather, “But I kicked him because he hit me.”

No one ever wants to admit wrong. We all think we are righteous.

This was especially true during the time of the Judges. This morning I want to look at an extreme example of self-righteousness that we find in Judges 17. Unfortunately, I think that we as the church today can be guilty of some of the same things we find in this chapter.

Judges 17:1-6

In these first 6 verses we are taken on somewhat of a roller coaster ride. We are first introduced to a man named Micah. His name means “Who is like Yahweh?” The ancients did not have Christian t-shirts, so they would name their kids in a way that reflected their devotion to God. This name says to the Canaanites, “I see your gods, but they don't compare to mine.” So we start off good.

However, we quickly learn that Micah has broken the 8th of the 10 commandments by stealing 1100 pieces of silver. Not only that, but he has also broken the 5th of the 10 commandments in that we stole from his mother of all people, thereby dishonoring her.

The mom's response starts off good. She blesses her son in contrast to the curse she had already uttered, and then she dedicated the money to the Lord. What a picture of love, forgiveness, and dedication to the Lord.

But any admiration for the mother is quickly eliminated as we learn that the way she wants to dedicate the silver to the Lord is by making an idol, thus breaking the 2nd of the 10 commandments. Whatever her motive, we are left with the idea that she genuinely wants to please the Lord.

Not only is there an idol made, but we learn in verse 5 that Micah had a shrine, or a temple for his idols. This is directly against what the Lord had said over and over again in Deuteronomy. There God instructed the people to not worship him in just any place, but rather go to the central place that he would choose to worship him. At this point that place is in Shiloh, which, ironically, is not far from Ephraim.

And then just to make sure that there is enough sin going around for everyone, Micah ordains his son to be priest. The Lord had separated the Levites to be priests unto himself.

Verse 6 stands as a summary verse for not only this story, but all of judges.

Judges 17:7-13

In verse 5 we saw that Micah made his son to be priest, but in this passage we are introduced to a Levite who has no home. He probably has no home because the Israelites are worshipping other gods and therefore are not taking care of the Levites. So when Micah offers him a job, he can't pass it up. The problem with this little arrangement is that the Levites were meant to serve the entire nation, not just one individual.

Similar problems in the church

What a sad picture this is. Micah thinks what he is doing is good and right. From his point of view he was so devoted to the Lord that he created an idol to represent him and he built a house for him to dwell in. He loved the Lord so much that he made one of his sons priest. That is until a Levite became available. He brought the Levite in just knowing that the Lord would bless him because of all these wonderful things he had done for Him.

But God sees it a different way. (Deuteronomy 12)

Proverbs 16:2 *All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.*

There is a way that we can look at the things we do and think this is good, but when you consider the spirit, it's actually bad.

Let me give you two examples of how we can be guilty of the same things as Micah

1) **Misplaced Motivations**

Micah had misplaced motivations that seemed to drive his actions. We see this especially in verse 13.

Micah was excited when he met this Levite. He knew that the proper way to go to God was through the Levites. He thought that by taking care of this Levite God would bless him. Indeed, God did say he would bless his people when they took care of the Levites. However, Micah is totally blind to the depth of sin that he and his countrymen have fallen into.

At the end of the day Micah is simply trying to manipulate God. He is not interested in doing what the Lord says. He does not love the Lord with all of his heart, soul, and might. He is merely motivated by God's blessing.

What are our misplaced motivations?

To earn God's blessing:

- If we have the right kind of music then God will bless our church.
 - Quiet time if I read my Bible in the morning I will have a good day.
 - To gain approval of man
- Acts of service we get involved in every aspect of the church so that people will be pleased with us.
 - Quiet time I have to read my Bible every morning so that people will think that I am spiritual
 - To be seen as righteousness I am the idol
- True Christians attend three Church services a week.
 - Hair cut a certain way
 - Spend a certain amount of time in my quiet time.
 - To gain God's approval
- I have to go to church or God will cause something bad to happen.
 - I have to have my quiet time everyday so that God will approve of me.
 - I have learned over the last few months that there a number of people who struggle with doing things to try and gain God's approval. It seems that no matter what they do, God still doesn't look on them with favor. This seems to be especially true of people who have faced some kind

of abuse in the past. I want to tell you two things. 1) There is nothing you can do to gain God's approval. 2) Christ has gained God's approval for you! You are a loved and cherished child of God, and he approves of you because of what Christ has done. "But what about when I sin?" John tells us that when we sin we have an advocate one who speaks on our behalf before the Holy Judge of the earth. Not only that, but John goes on to say that Jesus is our propitiation he has completely satisfied the wrath of God on our behalf. He has exhausted God's wrath. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins!

What do you notice about the things I just mentioned? These things are good and godly. They seem so right in our eyes. But when God looks at our spirit, what does he see? What is the motivation of your heart? Do you do these things out of a genuine love for God? If so, praise God. True faith will result in fruit bearing obedience to God's word.

But are there other motivations? Earning God's blessings, Approval from man, to be seen as righteous, gaining God's approval...

True faith will result in fruit bearing obedience to God's word motivated by a heart that loves God.

The second thing from this story of Micah I think we can be guilty of is doing what is right in our own eyes.

2) Doing what is right in our own eyes

In verse 6 we see that everyone did what was right in his own eyes. This phrase is used one other time at the end of the book (21:25). It stands as a stinging indictment. God had specifically told them to not do what was right in your own eyes. While this phrase is only used twice in the book, there is another phrase that carries the same meaning repeated numerous times, "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD."

To do what is right in your own eyes is to do evil in God's eyes. You make yourself to be God. You determine what is right and wrong. You declare that you answer to no one.

What leads a people to get to the place where they do what is right in their own eyes? There is an ominous verse in 2:10 of Judges. "generation who did not know God." And the next verse says, **Judges 2:11** "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD."

I just read an article in a missions magazine that addresses this very subject. It recounted all of the great and marvelous things that the evangelicals in Britain did in the 18th and 19th centuries. They ended slavery, banned child labor, abolished infant sacrifice in India, and the list goes on. There was one thing they did wrong they lost their sons and daughters and grandchildren to agnosticism and the atheism. There arose a generation after them who did not know the Lord. The reason this generation was lost is because "anti-intellectualism" took hold of the evangelical church in Britain. "They did not think it worthwhile to intelligently engage the skeptics, German biblical critics, agnostics and atheistic philosophers of their day. Instead, they claimed, God had called them to a purely practical faith: to send forth missionaries, to help the poor and downtrodden, to better people's manners. These were the things pleasing to God; not intellectual debate or true apologetics. In fact, a popular belief was that one could only prove the existence of God by looking deep within one's own conscience." God's existence is subjective according to if I feel him or not.

Essentially, these dear Christians found no reason whatsoever to have a reason for the hope that was in them. When skeptics wrote against Christianity, they saw no reason to respond. This seemed so right in their eyes.

However, when the next generation came along and they began reading the skeptics. They began to be challenged by those who do not believe in Christ. And they were left with nothing to stand on. They had no rational defense of the gospel to rest on. All they had was a feeling. So, they turned away.

Are we in danger? You better believe it. We live in a culture that says we need to be tolerant of all religions. It is claimed that all religions are basically the same, and all lead to heaven. One of the hallmarks of our faith is that Christ is the only way to Heaven. Yet, in a recent poll, 57% of evangelical church attendees said that many religions can lead to eternal life. What people are saying is that it seems so good that other people won't go to hell because they believe differently than me. Those people have the right to believe what they want, who am I to say anything?" It seems right in their own eyes to adopt a pluralistic worldview, but from God's point of view it is wicked.

Not only that, but we have popular writers telling us that is ok to abandon the doctrine of the trinity; the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ; the doctrine of the Virgin birth

What's the solution? We need to send forth missionaries and help the poor; we even need to feel God's presence I am not anti-emotion. But we also we need to pursue a deep, rational, robust, knowledge of God so that we can confidently proclaim the gospel. Knowledge is important, don't fall into the trap of anti-intellectualism. John 17:3; Colossians 2:1-4

No king

The reason the people were doing what was right in their own eyes is because there was no king. Deuteronomy tells us that one of the roles that the king was to fulfill was to keep the people faithful the Lord. He was to have a copy of the law by his throne at all times. He was not to have much wealth, many wives, not even a large army. What we see in Judges is a people without a spiritual leader. And even the leaders who do arise and deliver their people from oppression, at the end fail to lead the people in faithfulness to god.

As we move along in Biblical history we see the pattern repeated over and over again. Saul, David, Solomon...So the stage is set for the King. He comes in the form of a human. Lives a sinless life. Dies for our sins. Raised from the dead and is seated at the right of God making intercession for his people. He will return to establish on earth, but even now you can join his kingdom by believing in Him for the forgiveness of your sins. Don't turn to good luck charms to get you in. Don't be deceived thinking that you can do whatever you want to do and believe what you want to believe. It is only in Christ that you will find salvation.