

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story Chapter 8: Jars of Clay
Pastor Dave Scherrer - October 30, 2011

You remember where we left off last week. Joshua had “fit the battle of Jericho”, and of Ai and over the Amorites and Canaanites. The nation of Israel had finally entered their Promised Land and for the most part this was an encouraging story. Joshua is really quite a hero and this is a story of people finally being obedient and God blessing them for their obedience.

Now in this next book of Judges we find the opposite happening. It really is the story of the nation of Israel failing over and over, and over and over . . . As Mike said at the end of the story of Joshua, this was really a battle for human hearts not land and that battle for hearts continues in Chapter 8 of the Story; The Story calls it “Looking for a few good men . . . and women.”

We have made a point of noticing the difference between the Upper Story or as Mike called it last week the GStory (God’s Story) from the Lower Story or the IStory (The Story from the human perspective). It takes discipline to ask the question, “What is happening here in this story from God’s perspective? What are His values that are being expressed and how can I apply these Upper Story perspectives to my life?”

For instance we read in chapter one of Judges that the various clans of Israel fail to complete the conquest that God demanded and that resulted in hardship for the nation of Israel for hundreds of years to come. Let’s read about it..

Judges 2:6-12 (p. 103, The Story)

After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD’s anger . . .

But God’s anger and discipline was not where it ended . . .

Judges 2:16, 18-22 (p.104, The Story)

Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, “Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did.”

Deuteronomy 5:6-10 (p. 61, The Story)

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before me.

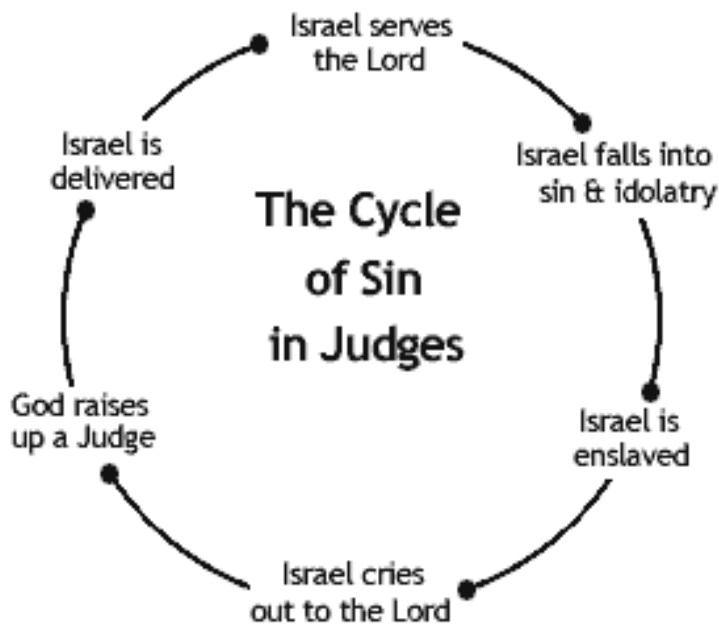
“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I,

the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Over and over the Israelites stumble, a nearly 400 year downward spiral. The sons of Israel go back to worshipping the so called gods or idols of the locals, worshipping Baal or Ashtoreth. If it wasn't so sad it would perhaps have been somewhat funny. The first judge dies and in chapter 3 verse 12 we read, “Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.” Then in 4:1 we read “then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.” 6:1, “the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.” 10:6, 13:1, same thing; again and again and again for hundreds of years they worship idols, got occupied, lamented to the Lord and God saved a savior for them.

Enemy	Years of Bondage	Judge	Deliverance and Rest	Scripture
Mesopotamia	8	Othniel	40	3:7-11
Moab	18	Ehud	80	3:12-31
Canaan	20	Deborah	40	4:1-5:31
Midian	7	Gideon	40	6:1-8:28
Ammon	18	Jephthah	6	10:6-12:7
Philistia	40	Samson	20	13:1-16:31

If you could see it in graphic form it would look something like this . . .



Right about here you might say, “**What does this have to do with us?**” Even better we might ask what God’s perspective on this story might be?” What is the upper story perspective? I think there are a couple of them.

First and foremost I think that it must not escape our notice that God over and over steps in and saves His people. It wasn't because the people deserved to be saved. It wasn't even because the judges were so faithful and obedient. No, it was simply because God in His mercy saves; His very good business to resurrect the dead back to life. I think this is the first and most important upper story of this Chapter 8. I want to come back to this in a moment.

Secondly I think we should look at our 21st century idols.

Driver's License or Credit Card symbolize it all.

Finally we learn that there is no one in this story who doesn't have feet of clay.

Feet of clay

This term is found first in Daniel 3 when part of the description of the huge statue in the dream of Chaldean King Nebuchadnezzar was described as mostly made of hard metals but his feet were made of fragile clay. The idea is that even in someone apparently strong and without failings there exists foundationally a hidden weakness which could cause his or her downfall.

Scripture says we are all subject to the same set of flaws, all of us. The so called leaders and the so called followers. Each of us battle our stuff. As the author of the book called Hebrews describes it as "the sin that so easily entangles us." Gideon did, Samson did. These judges were not perfect; they were just called by God for His purposes.

Judges 6:11-16

"The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian."

The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive."

Gideon became a victorious judge but he also committed some terrible sins. You remember Sampson for his feats of strength but he also sinned in horrible fashions. What we learn is that God uses us in our weakness, leaders, followers and people in between all are used in their weakness.

God uses us in our weakness: Do you have feelings of failure and inadequacy?

Personal testimony: My life as a performance-based follower of Christ: Everything in my life falls short. If I had to grade my efforts I would give myself an F because there would always have been something more I could have done. When Jesus comes to me and says, "Dave I just want you to quiet down and follow me and you don't have to work so hard." And my response to Jesus is, "You are right Jesus I can do better, I will work harder, I will try harder. I will go do that slow down thing right now."

This past month in my weakness, God has been with me. I have been unable to perform in any way. I feel like I am letting my fellow staff down, I felt like I was letting you down, letting Jesus down. But in that moment of my weakness God reminded me, "Dave your weakness is my business, everyone on earth has feet of clay. In fact from the very beginning we were made of dust, of clay. But here is the very good news. God has filled us with His Holy Spirit and it is through His power and presence that all good things happen. It is not up to me to out-perform God. I can't. There is nothing that I bring to the table. Every good deed I have ever performed has been in the solitary power of God and in that sense I have never failed because God has never

failed. Time and time again I have lost sight but God has rescued me time and time again. He reminds me that I am a jar of clay, very humble and frankly not too expensive, but I am built to do a very important job. That is to house the Holy Spirit of God. We are Jars of Clay and that is a very good thing.

Jars of Clay

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

2 Corinthians 2:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

You can come to Jesus in your failure and your sadness and your woundedness and he will accept you, in fact that is the only way to come to Jesus. If you think that by performing well that you add anything to your case for being accepted, you are simply wrong. Learn from my life, don't follow this part. And if you are like me and have struggled with sin that won't go away and you struggle with feelings of shame and guilt and failure, take heart. Over and over we sin and over and over God says I love you and will deliver you.

You have a champion. You have a father in heaven who loves you more than life itself. He would die for you. In fact, he did. God so loved you that he sent his only begotten Son so that you would know in no uncertain terms that you have loved, just as you are. God's grace has over and over saved you, once for all.