

Doing What Seems Right

Our Upside-Down World Series, May 22 & 23, 2021 | Judges 17:1-6

WHAT'S LIFE LIKE "BEHIND THE SCENES?"

What's life like "behind the scenes" for characters at theme parks?

This summer many of us will be heading to theme parks, and we will be greeted by people dressed up in costumes that resemble cartoon characters.

Life-sized cartoon characters entertain our kids and make fun photos.

If you see them enthusiastically greeting guests, you might think that they have fun jobs, but do you ever wonder what their experience is like behind the scenes?

Character actors work long hours.

The costumes are heavy, awkward, hot, difficult to see in, and sometimes difficult to breath in.

They get poked, pulled, and ridiculed.

That's life "behind the scenes" for characters at theme parks.

What was life like "behind the scenes" in the book of Judges?

For the past few weeks, we have been studying the Old Testament book of Judges.

We have been examining the lives of the leaders of Israel in the period between the settlement of the Promised Land and the days of the kings.

The final chapters of Judges focuses on life "behind the scenes" for the ordinary families and citizens of Israel. What was their life like? Life for the everyday person was just as upside down as life was for the leaders and the nation.

What's life like "behind the scenes" when the world turns upside-down?

MICAH DID WHAT SEEMED RIGHT TO HIM.

Judges 17:1-6 documents the life of one family "behind the scenes" during this period:

There was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, "The 1,100 pieces of silver that were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse, and also spoke it in my ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD." And he restored the 1,100 pieces of silver to his mother. And his mother said, "I dedicate the silver to the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a carved image and a metal image. Now therefore I will restore it to you." So when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took 200 pieces of silver and gave it to the silversmith, who made it into a carved image and a metal image. And it was in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and ordained one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Let's think about what happened before we met Micah.

Before we met Micah in Judges 17, someone stole 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother.

When the mother learned that the silver was missing, she was very angry.

In her anger, she put a curse on the person who stole it. Since she invoked the name of the LORD when she tried to reverse the curse, she likely mentioned the name of the LORD when she invoked the curse. Perhaps she said, "May the LORD cause the teeth of the person who stole my silver to fall out." We don't know what she said specifically.

We do know that Micah heard what she said and feared that the LORD would act against him.

What happened in this instance had some faithful overtones.

First, Micah admitted that he had taken the silver and given it back to his mother.

His mother asked the LORD to bless her son for returning the money.

Then she dedicated the money to the LORD out of gratitude for the LORD returning it.

That meant she used the money to create a set of objects that would be used for the glory and worship of the LORD.

However, everyone involved made massive mistakes.

Let's not forget that Micah stole a bunch of money from his own mother. That's just wrong.

Micah's mother lied to the LORD. She said that she would give him all the silver but then kept most of it for herself.

Next, Micah's mother commissioned a carved image and a metal image to be made. The carved image was likely an image depicting the LORD. However, the LORD had forbidden the Israelites from making any images of him. In **Exodus 20:4** the LORD said to the people of Israel through Moses:

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

Beyond that, Micah had a shrine constructed at his home which was forbidden. The people of Israel were supposed to worship at one place. In this era, that was Shiloh.

Then Micah commissioned a set of household idols which was expressly forbidden.

Finally, Micah ordained one of his own sons the priest at this shrine. That too was a mistake as the only priests allowed were the sons of Aaron from the tribe of Levi.

Judges 17:6 tells us why: Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

That was the perspective of the people, and that was the problem of the day. Everyone did what seemed right to them.

They stole when they wanted, lied when they wanted, and made up their own religion to suit their needs.

WHAT DOES "DOING WHAT SEEMS RIGHT TO US" MEAN?

"Doing what seems right to us" means picking and choosing. We live in a "pick and choose" culture.

I've quickly learned to love the ice cream at the Tulmeadow Farm Store in West Simsbury.

Whenever I go, it seems like they have dozens of flavors.

Not only that, but they have multiple different sizes, depending on how much you want.

And you can get your ice cream in a cup, a cone, a sugar cone, or a waffle cone.

They have all these choices, and they need to. We expect it. I expect it. Why? Because we live in a “pick and choose” culture, and we like it.

That’s the essence of “doing what seems right to us.”

We “pick and choose” what to do.

It’s very easy say this about the culture around us because the culture around us likes to pick and choose morality. People around us like to do what seems right to us when it comes to language, identity, intimacy, the meaning of justice, and a bunch of other things. That’s the world, though, and we expect that non-Christians will behave as non-Christians.

However, we Christians “pick and choose” as well, particularly in the areas of discipleship. We like to think of things like serving people, sharing the Gospel, joining communities, worshipping, studying the Bible, praying, fasting, tithing, and demonstrating Christian character as things we can pick and choose from. We pick the things we like and choose to ignore the things we don’t like. We “pick and choose” what to do.

We “pick and choose” what to believe.

This may not seem obvious since we are strong on what we believe. We say that we believe the Bible and biblical doctrine.

Even so, we pick and choose what to believe in subtle but important ways.

We pick and choose parts of the Bible to emphasize and parts to ignore.

We pick and choose interpretations of the Bible we like and discount those we don’t like.

Pretty soon, we have a customized religion and a god made with our own hands.

That was certainly the case with Micah. Micah and his mother commissioned a carved a statue of the LORD that they could use in their worship.

If it’s an image of the LORD designed to help us worship better, then why would we be forbidden to make such images? What’s the problem?

The problem is that an image of God is always only a partial image of God. It’s never a full or accurate image of God; God is simply too big to capture in an image!

Plus, any image of God emphasizes the aspects of God that we like. That’s not a god at all.

We can’t create gods to suit ourselves; that’s idolatry.

We can’t create or own religion either; there’s nothing real about it.

Tim Keller wrote, “But when we simply ignore (either intellectually or psychologically) the parts of God we don’t like, it means we don’t have a God that can ever contradict our deepest desires or say ‘no’ to us. We never wrestle with him. We never let him make demands on us. We can end up worshipping a much more comfortable God, but also a non-existent one.” – *Judges for You*, 170.

When is the last time God challenged you? When is the last time God changed your mind or your behavior? If it has been a while, then that’s a problem.

The book of Judges described it this way: There was no king.

Some interpreters say that the book of Judges was written by people who were arguing that kings—particularly kings descended from King David—were the best, right solution for Israel.

That’s not actually what the book of Judges is saying or arguing. Let’s look briefly to the book of 1 Samuel in the Old Testament to see what the book of Judges is in fact arguing.

In the book of 1 Samuel, Samuel became a priest, prophet, judge, and leader of Israel for years. Toward the end of his life, he thought that his sons might continue to lead Israel. However, his sons were not faithful to God, so the people pushed back against the idea. They asked instead for a king to lead them. Samuel was deeply frustrated thinking that the people had rejected him and his family.

God told Samuel to give the Israelites a human king. Plus, God comforted Samuel and told him that the people weren’t rejecting Samuel; they were rejecting God instead. In **1 Samuel 8:7** God said to Samuel,

“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”

No matter what form of government Israel had, the LORD was supposed to be their only true King, and the people were saying “no” to that concept, and to the LORD specifically.

Coming back now to the book of Judges, that’s what Judges is arguing. During this period of history, the Israelites had no king. They had rejected the LORD as their only true King which has consequences.

MICAH’S LIFE TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN.

Micah’s life seemed to have a happy ending.

In the rest of Judges chapter 17, Micah met a young Levite who came from Bethlehem in Judah looking for a job and a new adventure.

Micah asked the young Levite to settle down in his home, become his spiritual advisor, and serve as his family’s chaplain. The Levite agreed, and Micah ordained him as priest.

Micah finally had it all—money, family, his own private shrine, his own private priest, and his own private connection to his own private god. He seemed to have it all.

However, his life subsequently turned upside-down in Judges chapter 18.

The tribe of Dan had failed to secure a homeland for itself.

They were allotted land along with every other tribe in Israel. However, Judges 1:34 records that the people of Dan were displaced from their land and ended up wandering in the hills.

Much later (as recorded in Judges 18), the people of Dan were looking for a home.

They sent a scouting party to find a new home for them north of Israel.

On their way to their mission, they stopped in the hill country of Ephraim at the house of Micah. They met and liked Micah’s priest, and they saw and liked Micah’s shrine.

When they returned that way with 600 armed men, they stopped once again at Micah’s home. They stole his shrine, took his priest, robbed him of all his livestock, and captured some of the younger members of Micah’s household.

When Micah came home and learned what happened, he gathered armed men and set out to stop the raiding party from Dan and recover what they had taken.

However, when he caught up with them and confronted them, he was clearly in the weaker position. The army from Dan told Micah to go home quietly or they would kill him.

That's what happens when everyone does what seems right to them. Might makes right.

Micah lost everything. His world turned upside-down.

When we do what seems right to us, our world turns upside-down.

This story repeats itself over and over and over again.

It doesn't just happen to the Israelites in the past; it happens today.

It doesn't just happen to the leaders; it happens behind the scenes.

It doesn't just happen to someone else; it happens us.

Big problems disrupt our lives, and our world turns upside-down **violently**.

Our solutions no longer work, and our world turns upside-down **philosophically**.

Hope fades and we are pulled toward despair, and our world turns upside-down **emotionally**.

This is true not only in time but for eternity as well.

We need to be very clear about this today.

When we do what seems right to us, we are in open rebellion against God.

When we spend all our lives in rebellion against God and end our lives in rebellion against God, then our eternity gets turned upside down as well.

If we never surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, our only true King, then eternal death in hell is our destination. We need to be very, very clear about that today.

LET'S SURRENDER TO THE ONLY TRUE KING.

Surrenders involve a change of flags and a change of command.

It happened after the siege of Yorktown during the American Revolution.

British general Lord Cornwallis made that clear when he moved his troops into Yorktown in the summer of 1781. As he arrived at Yorktown, he wrote to the residents, "You will deliver the town immediately." Whatever the loyalty of the people of Yorktown had been before, it was clear that if they would now be under the British flag and command.

Combined American and French forces on land and at sea moved quickly to cut Cornwallis off and isolate him in Yorktown.

After isolating Cornwallis, American and French forces pounded away at the British.

Cornwallis signaled his willingness to surrender by sending a lone officer with a white flag.

Two days later there was a formal surrender ceremony. General Cornwallis declined to attend saying that he was ill.

At the ceremony, the ranking British officer handed over General Cornwallis' sword.

British soldiers marched out and laid down their weapons as the American flag now flew.

British soldiers marched to the tune of "The World Turned Upside Down." Seriously. Their world had indeed turned upside down.

The “rebels” were now in charge, and the Americans were on their way to being recognized as a sovereign nation.

There was a change of flag and command when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown.

Picture your life today as a castle, a city, or even a country.

There is a flag flying over the castle, city, or country that represents your life.

The flag represents the one who is in command of your life.

What flag is flying over your life today?

Don't be too quick to answer that question. Honestly assess yourself first.

Jesus is the only true King of our lives.

I'm sure it doesn't come as a surprise to you to hear me say that.

One of the central arguments of the book of Judges is that the LORD is our only true King.

But it may not come as naturally to you to think of Jesus himself as that only true King in the flesh. We are more accustomed to thinking of Jesus as a softer, more accepting side of God.

However, we need to understand that Jesus is our only true King.

The concept is throughout the Bible really.

Perhaps nowhere is it more clearly stated, though, than in the Revelation. In chapter 19, almost at the end of the Bible, there is a striking description of King Jesus. He is riding a white horse and judging the world. His eyes are like fire, and he is wearing the crown of crowns. He is accompanied by the armies of heaven.

Let's pick up John's vision in **Revelation 19:15-16**:

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

“King of kings and Lord of lords.” The Revelation makes it clear that Jesus is our only true King.

Everyone else who claims command of our lives is a pretender or a rebel.

John Donne asserts that surrender to our only true King is difficult for all of us.

John Donne was a poet who lived centuries ago.

He wrote a sonnet that pictured our hearts as fortresses that are rebelling against God.

We long to acknowledge Jesus as our only true King, but we are just unable to give our whole life to God. We're unable to surrender.

In this sonnet, Donne argued that God may have to fight for control. He wrote:

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

We belong to Jesus, our only true King. We *should* belong to Jesus, our only true King. When we hold ourselves back from Jesus, our only true King, we are in rebellion. When we rebel against Jesus, our only true King, our worlds turn upside-down. When we give our lives fully to Jesus, our only true King, our lives tend to turn themselves right-side up.

Oh, that Israel could have learned that lesson sooner!

Oh, that we might learn that lesson now!

Let's surrender to the only true King.

What flag flies over the castle, city, country that is your life?

If it's not the flag of Jesus, then it's time to lower that flag. Lay down your weapons, hand over your sword, and acknowledge Jesus as King.