

“God’s Preserving Grace”
Judges 21
(Preached at Trinity, August 30, 2015)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The final three chapters of Judges finds Israel at one of their lowest points. Having forsaken God and they had fallen into depraved wickedness. And lacking spiritual leadership there was no one to call them to repentance.
2. To remind you once again, chronologically this passage actually takes place at the beginning of Judges, almost 300 years before Samson. It takes place shortly after Israel pledged to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice." How quickly can sin consume us when we leave off following God.
3. First we find the terrible scene at Gibeah. Demonstrating their utter spiritual bankruptcy, when they couldn’t have the Levite, they abused his concubine until she died.
4. As if this story isn’t depraved enough, the Levite chops her up and sends her to the other tribes. This resulted in a civil war that results in the near annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin.
5. As I’ve pointed out over the last couple weeks Israel has fallen into unthinkable sin—from an unfaithful concubine to a uncaring Levite to an unspeakably wicked people. Instead of the Levite giving spiritual guidance to the people he only contributed to the chaos. But in all the chaos we find the superintending hand of God.
6. In **Chapter 19** we find the sinful act in Gibeah
In **Chapter 20** we find the response of Israel—With a massive army of 400,000 they went to war, an act of retaliation against Benjamin.
We must not overlook **Verses 18, 23** – Regardless of the motivation of Israel, it was by God’s design. God was bringing judgment upon Benjamin’s sin.
 - A. But we are confused here. Israel enquired of God and God tells Judah to go up first. They immediately lost 22,000 men in the first battle.
 - B. Then they prayed again before God and being encouraged they went to battle a second day – and they lost another 18,000 men.
 - C. The point is this. God was bringing judgment upon sinful Benjamin, but Israel was not void of sin. They too had turned their back on God.
 - D. But then the hammer of God’s judgment fell
Judges 20:35 NAU - "And the LORD struck Benjamin before Israel,"
The army of Benjamin was decimated. Only 600 men survived.
7. But now we come to **Chapter 21**. Israel had purposed Benjamin’s utter destruction. They vowed that no Israelite would ever give one of their daughters to Benjamin.
Judges 21:1 NAU - "Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage."

8. Suddenly their heart turned at what had happened to Benjamin
Judges 21:2-3 NAU - "So the people came to Bethel and sat there before God until evening, and lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. ³ They said, "Why, O LORD, God of Israel, has this come about in Israel, so that one tribe should be *missing* today in Israel?"
Judges 21:6 NAU - "And the sons of Israel were sorry for their brother Benjamin and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today."
9. Their solution was less than honorable. First of all they killed all of the men of Jabesh-Gilead since they refused to join the tribes of Israel in war – **Verses 7-12**.
 A. As we can see in **Verse 14** it wasn't enough.
 B. The next thing they did was find a loophole in their vow of **Verse 1**
 They remembered the annual feast at Shiloh when the young virgins would come out to dance. They told the Benjaminites to hide in the vineyards and when they had the opportunity to kidnap the maidens for their wives.
 When the men of Shiloh complained regarding the vow they would tell them, "You didn't *give* your daughters, they were taken." – **Verses 22**
10. We must understand God was also behind this. Benjamin was a part of God's covenant people. God used Israel to teach us about His sovereign election and covenant promises.
 A. To understand we have to go back to **Genesis 12** and God's call upon Abraham.
Genesis 12:2-3 NAU - "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."
 B. Abraham had a son, Isaac through whom God would continue His covenant promise.
Genesis 17:19 NAU - "God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him."
 C. Isaac had two sons, twin boys, Jacob and Esau. Esau was the first born but God chose Jacob to be the son of covenant promise.
Genesis 25:23 NAU - "The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger."
 D. Jacob then had 12 sons by his two wives and their maids. It was through these 12 sons that God raised up the 12 tribes of Israel. It would be through these 12 tribes that God would carry out His redemptive purpose culminating in Christ and the Church.
 E. Later God ordained that the priests of Israel would wear an ephod as part of their priestly garment.
Exodus 28:4 NAU - "These are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me."
 Upon the ephod would be placed 2 precious stones engraved with the names of each tribe.

Exodus 28:9-10 NAU - "You shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth."

- F. Benjamin was Jacob's youngest son, one of two born to Rachel. His name was engraved upon one of the stones on the ephod. He was one of God's elect tribes of Israel. God would not allow one of His chosen to perish.
1. It was through Benjamin that God raised up Israel's first king
 2. And it was through Benjamin that God would raise up the man He would use to write much of the New Testament.
11. This points us to God's preserving grace for His elect people. This is where I want to direct our attention tonight as we close out the Book of Judges. This book is a book about sin and judgment but it is also a book about God's redeeming grace. God's purposes will not fail. Those whom God chose in eternity will surely be sustained until the end.
Philippians 1:6 NAU - "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*"
Romans 8:29-30 NAU - "*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*"
12. Herman Witsius (Dutch Reformed Theologian of the 17th Century) – "Those to whom God has freely given faith and holiness, he likewise keeps with such solicitous care, that it is impossible for any true believer totally and finally to fall away from that holiness when once it is begun, and thereby forfeit the salvation appointed for him."
 LBC 17:1 – "Those whom God hath accepted in the beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, and given the precious faith of his elect unto, can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance, whence he still begets and nourisheth in them faith, repentance, love, joy, hope, and all the graces of the Spirit unto immortality;¹ and though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, yet they shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them,² yet he is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palms of his hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity."
13. Tonight I want to look at the nature of preservation and perseverance.

- I. First, we need to understand those who are preserved
- A. It wasn't Ishmael who was God's chosen, although he was the firstborn son of Abraham.
Genesis 17:18-21 NAU - "And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" ¹⁹ But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹ "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."
1. Ishmael was not of God's elect
 2. God said of him –
Genesis 16:12 NAU - "He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand *will be* against everyone, And everyone's hand *will be* against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers."
- B. And it wasn't Esau who was God's chosen, even though he was the firstborn of Isaac. Paul wrote of God's election
Romans 9:10-13 NAS - "Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to *His* choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
- C. God is preserving His elect people – those whom He calls and sets apart unto holiness.
1. It isn't mere church people. It isn't those who merely *call* themselves Christians. It is those who God has raised up as His people
 2. Listen to Ephesians 1
Ephesians 1:4 NAU - "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."
 3. To lose one of those for whom Christ died would make a mockery of the crucifixion and call into question God's ability to accomplish His redemptive purpose.
 4. Those whom God preserves persevere until the end.

- II. Genuine conversion presses on. The saints of God will persevere till the end –
1. Perseverance doesn't mean sinlessness. A true believer may be guilty of sinning against God
 - a. He may even commit atrocious sin and grieve the Holy Spirit
LBC 17:3 – “And though they may, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.”
 - b. God will not allow one of His own to continue in sin. God will convict us and chasten us and bring us back to obedience.
 - c. The true believer will never forsake the Christian life - He presses on
 2. The true believer presses on through every circumstance of life. Perseverance does not grow cold during trials
 - a. Jesus spoke of the stony heart professor
Matthew 13:20-21 NAU - "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away."
 - b. Trials are the very things sent to try and test our faith to prove it genuine
1 Peter 1:7 NAU - "so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"
 3. There is a whole perversion of Christianity today that teaches God wants us to be prosperous and healthy – that He wants us to have an abundant life that's measured by the abundance of this world.
 - a. What happens when adversity comes? Do they press on?
 - b. How many church members today would go to prison for their faith?
 - c. How many church members would undergo cruel torture for their faith?
For many today, you cannot even get them to come to church let alone give themselves in service to Christ.
They offer up every possible excuse.
 - d. Paul said, **2 Timothy 1:12 NAU** - "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day."
 4. Perseverance is not drawn away by worldly affairs or materialism
 - a. Jesus described this as the profession choked by thorns
Matthew 13:22 NAU - "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

- b. The Bible has much to say about materialism – severe warnings
Matthew 6:24 NAU - "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."
- 5. Perseverance is not distracted from Christian duty
2 Timothy 2:3-4 NAU - "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."
Luke 9:62 NAU - "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

III. Our Perseverance is completely the work of our Triune God

- A. This is the lesson being taught here in Judges
 - 1. Benjamin was part of Israel. God is demonstrating His electing grace
 - 2. God's election finds its fullness in the church
John 6:39 NAU - "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
 - 3. How can God lose those whom He has chosen to eternal life?
 - 4. Would God allow the loss of a single one of those He has given to His Son for an inheritance
John 10:29 NAU - "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand."
- B. It is secured upon the work of Christ
John 10:11 NAU - "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."
John 10:28 NAU - "and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."
 - 1. Consider the horrors of the cross and then imagine that Christ would ever allow a single one of those for whom He died to be taken from Him
 - 2. Will He not protect those who have now become His property
- C. It is maintained upon the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Shall the One sent to abide with us forever now leave us and forsake us?
John 14:15-16 NAU - "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. ¹⁶ "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever"
 - 2. He is called the earnest of our inheritance – shall that prove worthless
 - 3. How can the Holy Spirit lose one within whom He dwells
Jude 1:24-25 NAU - " Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."

Conclusion:

1. This grand work of God gives us confidence that our faith is genuine
1 Peter 1:3-5 NAU - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."
2. The Bible gives sufficient evidence of conversion that no one should be fooled into believing he has something that he does not.
 - a. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit as we compare our lives with the testimony of Scripture.
1 John 3:21 NAU - "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God"
 - b. Our faith is increased by the fact we are pressing on. We are continuing in the faith. We are progressing in the faith. The Christian graces in our lives are increasing.
3. God's redemptive purpose will never fail. This has been in the background of the Book of Judges and we can see it clearly in the end. The judges were raised up by God to deliver and preserve His elect nation. But His ultimate purpose for Israel was in bringing in His ultimate Deliverer, the Savior of His people, those chosen before the foundation of the world.