

Lent 4  
Judges 10:6-16  
March 14, 2010

God preaches His Law, His holy Commandments and everything that goes along with them, out of love and mercy. His love is His motive.

But that doesn't mean that the law is easy on sinners. It is harsh medicine. But sin the disease, is worse. And, certainly, the law is not the only medicine God uses to help people. These verses illustrate all of this.

We see, from these words of God, that

### God Feels the Misery of Our Sin.

What God saw in Israel at the time was sin, sin and more sin. The very first word I read to you is very telling, 'again.' "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD."

By this 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, we have heard about five such violations against God. Each time they dropped the Lord for some or other false god, an idol, usually Baal and Asheroth. So, they disregarded the very first commandment.

Here it seems to have gotten worse. The words heap it up here. They again swerved the Baals and Asheroths. But they also served the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. In other words, except for God, the one, true God; they were willing to follow any idol. It seems that they did not even include the LORD in their pantheon of gods.

And that is the way it is. If a person does not give his/her whole heart to the LORD God, very soon he/she will give none of his/her heart to the Lord. No sin wants anything to do with the Lord.

If sin can persuade us to give up one piece of God's Word, the Holy Bible, it'll not be satisfied until we have given up the whole Bible.

If you expect God to put up with competition in your heart, you will find out that, in fact, your heart soon enough will have no room for the Lord at all. This is going on in the hearts of any number of members of this congregation right now. For various and sundry "reasons," people choose not to hear God's Word, choose not to spend time with Jesus on this Sunday or that one. The moment decisions like that begin to be made, it becomes easier and easier to make such decisions again. Eventually, they hardly ever appear at the times set aside for being with Jesus through His Word and Sacraments, and it doesn't even bother them. Then they become irritated if someone tries to get them to listen to Jesus again. Their hearts have become hard, cold, stony.

God knows how sin works. God works hard against sin, because He knows how awful, cruel, dangerous and deadly sin is.

Many in Israel didn't love the Lord anymore. And they were committing idolatry, a kind of spiritual adultery. The Lord still loved them and worked to get them back.

He allowed sin to have consequences. Egypt, the Hittites, and the old Babylonian Kingdom had all become weak. Had Israel relied faithfully on its Savior, He could have made it a wonderful, spiritual power in that whole part of the world so quickly. Instead, Israel became a wimp, attacked by anybody and everybody.

At this time, the Ammonites to the east and the Philistines to the west attacked them. How ironic! Israel worshipped the gods of the Ammonites and the Philistines as the Ammonites and the Philistines viciously attacked them. There were 18 years of misery. It ended with a crushing, shattering blow. Israel was in great distress.

In this world today many Christian bodies are weak. They have for decades already rejected the Bible as the pure, true Word of God. Wouldn't you think that a church body that still teaches that the Bible is God's Word, the power of God unto salvation, would be a powerful, spiritual influence in the world? Are we, as much as we could be, should be? Are we dividing our hearts between the Lord and a hundred other things? Will our hearts have any room for Jesus much longer? Will we lose it all, too?

I tell people that sinners are slow learners. Eighteen years of misery and Israel finally turned to the LORD for help. They said, "We have sinned against the LORD." Confession of sin is promising, if it is genuine.

Problem two, people can think of God's grace and love and forgiveness and salvation as cheap and easy. God can be used in emergencies. We finally pull the lever and summon the fire department when flames and smoke are everywhere. Before this chapter, on at least four previous occasions, Israel had "broken the glass" of heaven and on each of these occasions, God responded by forgiving them. When the crisis was over, guess what? They went right back to their impenitent ways or worse.

In Paul's day, when people heard that salvation is entirely by God's free grace in Christ Jesus, some people suggested that they could sin as much as they wanted because there was always more grace to be had! Paul informed them that their attitude would cut themselves off from all grace. Their attitude is, in fact, unbelief!

And God told Israel chilling words. "For each of your seven sets of idols, I have seven times already rescued you and what did you do? You left Me for those idols. Go, pray to those idols! Let them save you! I'm NOT going to save you." Chilling words. It's law preaching. Don't turn God's free grace in our Savior Jesus into something cheap. If you do, there'll be no Gospel, for you will have rejected it.

But this was not God's final word. The Gospel was.

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“The LORD could bear Israel’s misery no longer.”

God felt for them. He felt the misery their sin had brought on them. God knows also that sin leads to eternal misery. Jesus Christ carried this to the fullest. On the cross, He literally felt our misery. He carried all the sin of the world and its guilt and its curse and its punishment. He died for it all. How much is the eternal life of God worth? More than we can begin to imagine. This is why God’s grace, complete with forgiveness and eternal life, is not cheap. Jesus paid for it with His life! This is also why it is truly free. Jesus paid for it for us. Appreciate God’s gift of forgiveness. Love it! Treasure it. Use it to defeat sin and unbelief. Amen.