

SERMON - PASTOR GREG GRAHAM  
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JUDGES. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you ever been to court? Have you ever sat before a judge? What do you think of when you hear the word 'JUDGE'? Let us pray.

Living as slaves, the Jewish people cried out for help. God heard their cry and sent Moses. For 40 years Moses had lead the people of Israel but now his time was ended. He was followed by Joshua who led the people into the Promised Land. At the age of 110 Joshua died. In Judges 1 we hear: *After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?"* Who will lead Israel? Who will save them? Who will fight for them? Who will teach them? Who will judge them?

Over the next 600 years God sent a series of men and one women to the people. When we think of the word 'JUDGE' we usually think of the law court and pronouncements of either 'innocent' or 'guilty'. And this is true in the biblical sense as well but there is another dimension which we often ignore. To JUDGE is to RIGHT WRONG. And the biblical understanding of JUDGEMENT also has a strong element of salvation. And most definitely the Israelites needed all of this: condemnation, righting wrongs and salvation:

Judges 3:7: *The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and Asherahs. The anger of the LORD burned against them. We hear this word again and again throughout the whole account of the Judges.*

But we also hear this word: Judges 3:9: *But when they cried out to the LORD he raised up for them a deliverer- a JUDGE- a SAVIOUR.* The first one was OTHNIEL: The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war.

EHUD- who killed a very fat king. SHAMGAR. DEBORAH. GIDEON- *But LORD how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family...Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece.* TOLA. JAIR. JEPHTAH. SAMSON. Upon all of these people the Spirit of the LORD empowered them to lead the people, to judge the people, to save the people and to give the people of God peace. But again and again the Israelites forgot the LORD their God and went their way and not God's way. The book of Judges ends with a terrible story of rape, murder, war and death. The book ends with these words: *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*

The book of Samuel and kings tell much the same story. The people demanded a king and kings they got. But again and again the people of God went their way and not God's way and the result was the same: everyone did as he saw fit and suffering and death was the result. Indeed, the *wages of sin is death (Romans 6).*

The JUDGES failed. The KINGS failed. The PEOPLE OF GOD failed. We fail. Time and time again we go our way and not God's way. Time and time again we forget God. Time and time again we break the FIRST COMMANDMENT: *I am the LORD your God, who brought out of Egypt- out of the land of slavery. You shall not make for yourselves an idol in the shape of anything.* Few, if any of us have made an idol of stone or wood but maybe we have made an idol of success, of health, of possessions or even of family. Jesus said: *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

And that is why the Eternal Son of God put aside his divinity and power and glory and became one of us. That is why the Eternal Son of God humbled himself and became obedient unto death- even death on a cross. To atone for our sins. To take the punishment due to us. To die so that we might live forever- now and in eternity.

In response we repent again and again and we trust in the words of Jesus: Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.

Jesus is the Great High Priest. Jesus is the Prophet. Jesus is the King of kings. And Jesus is the Judge- the One who came to right the wrongs of the world.

Live forever in the peace of God through His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.