

Call to Worship: Joshua 24: 14-15

Hymn suggestions: I love to tell the story

Scripture Introduction: A long time ago in a land far, far away there lived a group of refugees, a homeless bunch of tent campers. Usually refugees are denied access to countries, shuffled into ghettos, enslaved or killed. At best, they have to start at the bottom of society and work their way into land and prosperity. But not this people. Because these refugees had a powerful ruler, a rich benefactor, they would start off with a whole nation, resources, fields already planted, vineyards already blossoming, barns already full, a just system of government, and a holy priesthood already in place. They would have everything they needed to thrive from the very beginning. There was only one thing they didn't have...obedience.

Prayer of Illumination: Thank you for this story. Thank you for sovereignly working in the lives of those who gave us this story to enable them to tell us the whole story. Help me to tell the whole story of this narrative. Help your people to hear, to hear and obey the whole story as it is told this morning. Amen

Scripture: Judges 2:1-15

Sermon Introduction: My brothers and sisters and I decided not to go to our grandfather's funeral. Grampa Hathaway had lived all his years in Rhode Island on an apple orchard. We called him grumpy gramps because he was grumpy. He would sit in his lazy boy and yell out answers to a blaring 'wheel of fortune.' He would try to give us crackers but when he pulled them out of his pocket they would always be very crumbled. He was a politically active philanthropic cook. And we loved him. But we didn't go to his funeral. Our father was intent on bringing his live-in girlfriend to the funeral and so none of us wanted to go. The wounds were too raw. Our parents had not even been separated a year. We told our father that we'd like to go but we weren't going to go if she came. Our father said his girlfriend was coming and singing at the funeral. So we decided not to go. I have apologized to my father for not going to his father's funeral. My father did not feel that he needed to apologize to me. If I had it to do over again I would go.

When our fathers and our forefathers disobey God it affects our lives. How has your parent's and grandparent's obedience to God blessed your life? How has your parent's, your ancestor's lack of obedience to God affected your life? For some, that's a question that should never be entertained because they worship their ancestors and never speak ill of the dead. But the Lord God forbids ancestor worship. He commands respect of elders but forbids worship of them. What does that look like? It looks like listening to and knowing the story of God's people and your people, knowing the story of God's mighty works in spite of people's sin. It looks like telling the whole story to your children and your children's children, the whole story of God's grace despite your sin. It means not just reading from the children's bible, or your favorite passages, the whole biblical story. It means telling the whole story of your spiritual journey and your people's spiritual journey.

But that's hard to do because if we tell our story we could be judged. It's hard to listen to the story and not judge. What frees us to confess, what enables us to listen graciously is God's everlasting covenant of grace with his people.

So listen to the whole story of judges 2.

Exegesis:

Judges 2:1 ¶ Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers.

The angel of the Lord is the very mouthpiece of God. The angel of the Lord doesn't say "Thus sayeth the Lord, He says "I say to you." He has authority. It's a foreshadowing of the Lord incarnate who teaches on the mountaintop like a prophet or rabbi would and yet instead of saying "The Lord says" or "Rabbi Hillel says" Jesus said "Truly, Truly I say to you." It is the same way with the angel of the Lord. "I brought you up from Egypt," "the land that I swore to give to your fathers." He speaks with authority on behalf of God to the people of Israel who have inhabited the land of Canaan. And he reminds them that he has already saved them and covenanted himself to them. He is about to tell them a hard

thing. He is about to challenge them on their sin and withdraw his hand. But first the Lord takes care to remind his people what he has done for them and what he will do for them.

The Lord doesn't follow the rules for a criticism sandwich: compliment, criticism, compliment. He doesn't follow the newer idea that you say a few quick negatives followed by a long list of positives. Nope. The only positives the Lord even mentions here are his own positive regard for Israel. He saved her from slavery and oppression in Egypt. He brought her out, not by her own hand, but by the strength of his arm. He burned a bush without singeing it, he caused a staff to turn into a snake, a hand to turn leprous and then healthy again. He turned the greatest river of ancient civilization into blood. He sent frogs, lice, flies, disease, boils, flaming hail, locusts, darkness and death to bring his people out to worship him. And if that's not amazing enough for you, God chose a speech-impaired, murdering immigrant to be his ambassador. Even after all that he split the Red Sea in two so his people could walk out of Egypt on dry land, he destroyed Pharaoh's elite troops. The Lord fed his people out of his own hand with manna and quail. He gave them water from a rock. He destroyed armies, changed the hearts of kings, split the Jordan in half so his people could again walk across dry and then proceeded to destroy walled cities, allied armies, giants and fortresses arrayed against him and his people. But that still isn't the whole story of God's faithfulness!

He did all this in spite of terrible sin on behalf of his people. First they didn't want to go. Then they blamed God for making their work harder. Then they complained about Moses, pharaoh's army, provision and once all those things were taken care of...they complained some more. They complained about the food, the lack of meat, the need for water, the lack of leadership. No sooner had God saved them and brought them to worship him alone, they start making an unauthorized bull sculpture to worship. What!?! Even so God chooses Aaron as his priest but Aaron's sons don't learn and they offer strange fire before God. God shows them the way into Canaan and promises that he will be with them but they say "No thanks, it looks too dangerous." What?!? God broke the Egyptians for you and

now you're afraid of some Canaanite tribes. What is this they have done?!? God's gracious provision becomes so much greater in light of his people's sin.

But his people's sin, blatant repeated sin, did not cause the Lord break his covenant with his people because His covenant was a covenant of grace. It's everlasting nature was rooted in the Lord himself, in his hesed, his steadfast lovingkindness. Listen to what he says "I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars." God moves directly from assuring a sinful Israel that he will never break his covenant with them, to give them a command to not make other covenants with the pagans around them. The Lord seems to be connecting the two things. Intimate covenant with God means no covenants with other Gods or even other pagans. That seems exclusive. That seems selfish of the Lord. But love, true love is by nature exclusive.

God's strategy seems counter intuitive to those of us who are authorities. As authorities we don't usually tell people, "No matter what you do I'll love you and be committed to you. Now go take out the trash." Some teenagers would call that bluff. And their parents would love them even when they didn't take out the trash...by disciplining them. That's similar to what's going on in our text today. God affirms his commitment to Israel but reminds her that she has failed to do what God commanded to do. "But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done" So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you."

Our American culture sometimes views discipline as antithetical to love. But here the Lord shows us that discipline is the means by which he shows his love. Youth, do you hear that? Discipline is the means by which God shows his faithfulness to his love. Many times the worst discipline God can give is to let us have what we want. His people didn't want to push out the Canaanites from their land, so God made it almost impossible for the Israelites to push out the Canaanites from their land. The Israelites wanted to treat the Canaanite gods as no big deal, the Lord God let them stay around to show the Israelites that the idols were indeed a big deal. The Israelites wanted to intermarry and enslave the Canaanites instead of

destroying them. God let the Israelites intermarry and become enslaved by the Canaanites. It is punishment fit the crime. God lets his people have the full consequences of their actions so that they see that God's word is true. But discipline does not mean that God doesn't love his people or that he's abandoning his people. He reaffirmed his loving action toward his people. He assured them of the everlasting nature of his covenant, that not even their sin can thwart his love. He made his expectations known and he makes the punishment known.

Now some of you may be reading this and thinking, "The story of a God who favors one nation over another, who tells one nation to commit genocide against another even killing women and children, who tells one nation to destroy another culture's artifacts and their livestock, this is what's wrong with world." This is the epitome of partisan, jingoistic, prejudicial hatred. You might think, it's one thing for a country to invade another and destroy it, but it's a devilish lie to say that God told you to do so. Let me first say, that this is a valid concern. People make Gods after their own image and then use them to justify what they always wanted to do. People use manmade religion to excuse the most reprehensible of deeds. People use God's authorization of war between one country and another at one particular time to authorize all manner of war for any number of reasons at any time. That is not what this scripture teaches, that is not what's going on here, but it's a legitimate concern.

First, let me allege that the ancient Israelites didn't make up a God in order to have a religious reasons to do whatever they wanted. First off, God didn't let them do what they wanted. Over and over they would complain about his commands and not follow them. This is not a manmade religion. Secondly, the Israelites didn't make up God's command to fight against the Canaanites to legitimize a war they already wanted to have. They didn't want to go to war against Canaan. They were really scared. They would rather have stayed in Egypt or in the wilderness. This is not a manmade command. Thirdly, just because God gave a particular command to a particular people at a particular time does not mean that those actions are normative. They're not. In the first place, Israel wasn't called to go to war with all pagans. Israel wasn't even told to clear out, or

subjugate all non-Jews on the Arabian peninsula, as Islam calls for the elimination or subjugation of all non-Muslims there (and elsewhere.) Israel is told to just execute God's judgment on the Canaanites. And if you think God is being unjust or unmerciful you need to go back to Genesis 18 and 19 and see that hundreds of years before the Canaanites were totally morally bankrupt with rampant inhospitable homosexuality. The Canaanites were prostitution loving baby-killers that God had been patient with for hundreds of years. If you have any concern for justice you can understand God's just desire to punish this people. What you really have a problem with is not God's justice. It's his mercy, because God used sinful Israel to execute judgment on sinful Canaan. It didn't take Israel long to be doing exactly the same kind of sins as Canaan did, see Judges 17-21. So if you still have a philosophical difficulty with God's mercy I encourage you to take it up with Him yourself.

So coming back to our text, how do God's people respond when God calls them out for their sin. And remember that the people God is talking to have been involved in a great war. These are soldiers that God is taking to task for their poor nation-building. He's telling warriors who have fought for his glory that they did not fully obey their commanding officer. God is taking them to task for not killing enough for not destroying enough. These are guys that followed God into battle against walled fortifications armed with little more than sticks. And they gathered together to hear the Lord rebuke them on the very hill on which all the adult males circumcised themselves for the Lord. So you might think these men might have some self-righteous anger at the Lord when he rebukes them but they don't.

The men's response is to cry over their sin. Not shed tears so much as cry aloud. Semites don't mourn silently but loudly. Imagine what the sound of thousands of Israelites groaning at the just rebuke of God for their sin. This was their corporate confession of sin "aaaaarghh." Times a thousand. Do you start to get a picture of what it looks like to be in relationship with the covenant Lord? He loves with an everlasting love but he is holy. He can and does call his people on their sin. And it is right for us to groan in response.

Groan and sacrifice. They probably offered sin offerings. This was a way for them to put their money where their mouth was. You really feel “aaaaagh?” Then show me with your wallet, with your resources. When God’s people are convicted of their sin they bring their resources and give them to God. It’s part physical mea culpa, “my bad,” for all to see, part demonstration that they know the seriousness of their sin, and part foreshadowing of the perfect sacrifice offered by the perfect priest to satisfy divine justice perfectly.

When God’s people were convicted of their sin, they cried out, they sacrificed and they changed the name of the place. They marked this occasion in their history books and on their map. So that whenever they looked at a map, or passed by the place it would remind them of what God said and what they did there. It was a physical mnemonic device to remind them to tell this story.

And that’s what the author of Judges is doing in this narrative, telling the story. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he’s telling the whole story. The bible is very unique as a historical book in how much it tells of the sins of the founding fathers. Most nations tell a whitewashed history of their glorious rise to greatness. Israel alone tells a story of a refugee people who in spite of continued sin, are chosen and preserved by the Lord of all nations. The authors of the bible over and over again confess their sin, confess their parents’ sin, and confess their hero’s sin. Why? Because they became convinced that righteousness is not based on how we are perceived or how we perform but on how secure we are in God’s love in spite of perception and performance.

The Israelites are telling on themselves in the text before us today. Sure, God inspired the writing of this book. Absolutely. But what the Holy Spirit did was inspire them, in the freedom that one has in an eternal covenant to lay it all out there, the good and the bad. You see, God’s grace is all the more beautiful, his faithfulness all the more glorious when the story of our sin is also told. It is right and beautiful for them to tell the whole story. If, on the other hand, we don’t factor in our forefather’s sin the story becomes arrogant. Without the story of Israel’s weakness and sin one can begin to believe that God was right to choose Israel because Israel is so good and wonderful. No! God’s favor isn’t because

these people did something right. It's the opposite. God gives gracious favor despite all their sin. But we wouldn't know that unless we had the whole story. If the biblical writers only included the wise things the patriarchs did, the victories and the good things that they participated in...we would hate the bible. It would provide almost no hope for us sinners. It would be a pharisaical document facilitating hypocritical works righteousness.

Application: So what will you do this day to give voice to the way that God is bringing conviction of sin? Does it look like a crying out? Does it look like an apology? A confession? A meditative study? Does it look like studying some history? Old Testament, New Testament, Church History or Family History? Does it look like changing the name you call something? Does it look like making an offering to the Lord? (For me I'm convicted that I need to tell my children my testimony of God's grace in my life. I need to write down a record of God's grace to me in spite of all my sin.) Hurry to do whatever the Lord is laying on your heart to do for this message is time sensitive.

Look at verses 6-10a "When Joshua dismissed the people, the people of Israel went each to his inheritance to take possession of the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. And Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years." And verse 10 "And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers." God sometimes raises up godly leaders who deliver the people, and lead with courage, and serve the Lord. But then they die and they almost always stay dead.

Sometimes the Lord raises up a whole generation of faithful servants. The Holy Spirit is not poured out in equal measure to each generation and each time and each culture. The generation of Joshua was a faithful generation. They did not walk in the ways of their fathers who died in the wilderness for lack of faith. They served the Lord, they executed justice even on their own people, they participated in covenant renewal ceremony where they publicly declared their allegiance to the Lord. They personally witnessed the great acts of the Lord in bringing them into the promised land. They didn't fully obey the Lord they mostly

obeyed the Lord. They served the Lord all the days of Joshua. That's great but Joshua died.

This is how it is with God's people, this is how it is with us now. The Lord raises up leaders and men who know the mighty works of the Lord but they pass on to be with the Lord for their eternal inheritance. Joshua is one of the greatest men in the pages of the Bible but when he died he stayed dead and that left God's people with a bit of a power vacuum.

What God's people needed was a deliverer, a leader, a general who lived not merely for 110 years but for a millennia. God's people needed a leader who would not be buried within the borders of his inheritance in Timnath-heres but whose inheritance would be the entire earth and whose burial would last not forever but merely for three days. What God's people needed was not an initial generation who knew the great works God had done but generation after generation after generation who knew the Lord who would not even need to say to one another "Know the Lord for they would all know him from the least to the greatest." That's what God's people needed and by the grace of God that's what God's people received in the second Joshua.

I speak of Jesus, whose Hebrew name was Yeshua, Yah saves. And it's not only the gates of Jericho that can't prevail against him, it's the gates of hell. And the last Joshua doesn't lead his people to take possession of Canaan, he leads his meek people to take possession over all the earth, the new heavens and new earth. This Joshua doesn't have to take off his sandals before the commander of the Lord's army, he is the commander of the Lord's army. Behold he comes on a white steed, he makes war, he is the only faithful and true leader, his eyes are flames of fire, his crown is encircled with jewels, his robe is dipped in blood from treading out the winepress of the fury of God almighty, and from his mouth comes a sword to strike down that ancient serpent, Satan whose head he has already crushed by his death on the cross. And he has a graphic tee and tattooed legs that proclaim him King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Allelujah!

So that's the good news. We serve a Joshua who doesn't die. Who is seated at the right hand of the Father. Who is coming again to judge the living and the dead.

But the sad news is verse 10b “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.” What?!? So soon. So quickly. Just as they’d entered into the promised land! Just as the former generation was resting after all the hard work they’d done following the Lord. And a whole generation doesn’t know the Lord. How is this possible? Is there any hope for our next generation? Is there anything we can do to guarantee that this won’t happen again, to us?

No. Because salvation is by grace, not by works so that no man may boast. There is no one work that you can do, there is no 12 step process, that will guarantee that the next generation will not abandon the Lord. That is all grace. There are some horrible parents whose children rise up to love the Lord with all their heart. There are some wonderful parents whose children rise up to abandon the Lord. There is no guarantee... but I do have a suggestion that comes from God’s word. Tell the next generation of the mighty deeds of the Lord. Next generation, listen to your elders tell the mighty deeds of the Lord.

Older generation there’s a temptation to assume the mighty deeds of the Lord because they have had such a formative impact on you. Older generation we can sometimes forget to tell others what seems self-evident to us. We can become so focused on what’s before us that we don’t take time to do our history, to tell of the mighty deeds of the Lord. And if you say, well, I’ve done that, now what? Tell ‘em again. Tell ‘em in a new way. Apply them to a new situation. Read through the whole bible all over again looking for the mighty works that God has done that you can communicate to the next generation. After you’re done that read through church history. Then make some church history of your own and write down or tell your own story of how God has been with you.

And younger generation, many of you do know the mighty deeds of the Lord but you can grow accustomed to them and assume them too. If you feel like you already know the mighty deeds of the Lord, then start trying to communicate them to your friends, to those younger than you to anyone who will listen. When I started wanting to tell others wonderful truths from God’s word it caused me to listen afresh to not only the story but how the story was being told, and how it

was being told to different hearers. Become a master storyteller, whenever there's a lull in the conversation, a wait in the line, a stop in traffic, try to tell one of the stories. And if you run out of stories ask your parents for more, and your grandparents and your youth pastor and your elder and your Sunday school teacher. The apostle John said that there are so many works of our Lord Jesus that if we were to write them all down the books would fill the earth. Do you believe that? Or do you believe you've already heard it all? You haven't. And even if you have, do you know it so well that you could tell it?

One thing may have put the brakes on the Joshua generation telling the next generation the story was the back story of their sin and their parent's sin. If they didn't mind telling about their parents sin, they might have had a hard time telling about their sin. If they didn't mind telling about their own sin they might have had a hard time telling about their parents' sin. But the story makes little sense otherwise, God's people's story, your story.

Why did Moses break the tablets of the law? Why did we stay in the wilderness so long? Why did God send poisonous snakes in our midst? Why did we not defeat Ai at first? Why did we linger so long at Baal Peor? Why are there still so many Canaanites in the land? Why did you marry a Canaanite woman? Do you see how it gets hard to tell the story? But if you tell half the story, I guarantee it will be boring and full of a hypocrisy that the next generation sees right through.

But next generation let me talk to you for a minute. There's a reason they don't tell y'all the whole story. They're afraid that if they tell you the whole story you won't respect them. We're afraid that if we tell you the whole story you'll hate us, rebel, and abandon the Lord because of our sin. We're afraid that if we let you in you will judge us and find us wanting. You will stop heeding us. You will use our sin as a bargaining chip. You will blackmail us and claim the moral high ground on us. We're the incumbents you're the insurgents. If we transfer power will you kill us and all we've fought for or will you still respect us and love us?

This is what we're afraid of, verse 11: "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after

other Gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and they bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoroth.” Do you see the connection between the sin of the Joshua generation and the sin of the next generation? The Joshua generation didn’t eradicate the Canaanites. They made covenants, they didn’t break down their altars, they intermarried with them. And what happens to the next generation, total abandonment of the Lord for the gods of the Canaanites. Woe! Woe! Lord have mercy!

Older generation have you ever seen this happen in your lifetime? It’s just a minor sin for you. It’s just a small discrepancy for you. It’s a hiccup in your long obedience. It’s your pet sin. Your little indiscretion or oversight. But the next generation, the next generation comes and forgets all the good things you taught them, all the good example that you laid for them and they latch on to your one sin, your only inconsistency, your Achilles heel and they run with it and take it... To its logical conclusion. Oh dear. Who can stand? Who can be saved? How can the covenant get from one generation to the next if only a small sin can utterly unhinge it. For we all have small sins...or do we?

There’s no such thing as a pet sin. There’s no such thing as a minor indiscretion. There’s no such thing as an only inconsistency, a small oversight. Sin knows no bounds. It is not private. It is not respectful. It abandons the Lord and leads to abandonment of the Lord. And if one sin can have generational impact that can lead to abandonment of the Lord how then shall we be saved? By a covenant of grace!

The only antidote for sin is the powerful cleansing blood of the sacrificial lamb, the Lord Yeshua. Because Yah indeed saves! Where sin abounded grace abounds much more. Where sin could cross a generation, salvation is from everlasting to everlasting. Where the nations were once a thorn in the side of God’s covenant people, now they have been made into God’s covenant people filling even the whole earth. Where once it was pagan’s who influenced and tainted God’s people. Jesus promises that his people will be salt and light, leaven leavening the whole loaf. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In the Old Covenant

the Canaanites were a cancer to God's people but in the New Covenant it's God's people that have gone viral filling the whole earth like that mustard seed weed fills the whole garden.

So God's grace is greater far than all our sin but next generation hear the warning as well as the hope. Do not think of this covenant as your fall back plan as your fire insurance as if God is like your dog wagging his tail while he waits for you to come back. Next generation, using your parents sin as an excuse to engage in a life of debauchery and license is dangerous. Do you know what terrible distress is? You don't want to find out but it looks similar to Israel back in the day: going after the stupidest things that those around you go for, trinkets. Going after counterfeit gods that you know are gods of your own making and cannot satisfy. You will shamefully grovel to get your god and that makes God the Lord so angry. So angry because he has every right to make you grovel, to make you crawl on the ground, or through a dumpster or in a sewer but when he doesn't you do it anyway for gods who are not gods. Do you see how that make provoke God to anger, needless anger. As you compromise and throw off restraint you will leave yourself open to theft, indebtedness, and labor you don't want to do. In your lust you will gain business partners who turn into enemies who overwhelm you and undermine you. And right when you'll want to call out to God you won't because you'll remember that you told God that you didn't need him or his input. You will end up in terrible distress, the Lord swears it. Consider yourself forewarned.

Does that scare you? Do you want to avoid that? Then lay hold of the covenant, see what a gracious and great God you serve and as you glory in his presence you will never want to leave. Get magnetized to God that even when you stray you will inexorably be drawn back to him by the power of his great love.

If you have not been baptized... Repent and be baptized it is the sign of the new covenant. If you have already been baptized but have not yet become a member, come before the elders to tell them about the resolve that the Lord has placed upon your heart to stay true to your baptism. Take up that wonderful means of grace the Lord's supper and let it minister to your soul as often as you take it.

Casting off sin and clinging to the one who provides you every sustenance for body and soul, the Lord Yeshua. These are the signs of the covenant of grace.

In the situation in our text today the disparity between the two generations came to the fore at the death of a godly leader. So these truths always apply but they especially apply in the context of the death of a great father or grandfather in the faith. The devil will try to seize that opportunity for sin but we must rather see it as one more chance to tell the leader's whole story of even his need of God's saving grace.

So in conclusion, the older generation must repent of disobedience to the covenant by telling the whole story of God's faithfulness. And the younger generation must lay hold of the covenant by listening to the whole story of God's faithfulness. But the only way that we can have the power to tell the whole story and to listen to the whole story is if our salvation is by grace alone.

- Only if our standing with God is secure in Christ's finished work on the cross can we let go of pride and confess our sin.
- Only if children know that their forebears are saved by grace will they be motivated to cling to the covenant. If they think their forebears saved themselves by their works the younger generation will despair and abandon the Lord.

Because God is holy and gracious let us not be so concerned about the appearance of piety that we neglect authenticity. Neither let us neglect piety in the name of authenticity. We must tell the whole story of God's faithfulness in spite of all our sin.

Let's pray...