

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan
March 10, 2013
Judges 10:6-16

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals."

The LORD replied, "When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"

But the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now." Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer.

What do all of these things have in common? The DMV. Wal-Mart. The Doctor's office. Your favorite restaurant. Any guesses? Could it be they are all located in Marinette and Menominee? Maybe, but that isn't what I have in mind. Could these all be places you could work? I guess, but still not it. Could it be I grow impatient waiting in line too long at these places? I think you are on to something. Our time is precious to us and if we are forced to wait for something we can grow impatient while waiting.

Do you think God ever gets impatient with us or our situation? Do you think God ever looks at our lives and says to himself, "I'm not happy with what is going on in their lives. It doesn't bring me joy at all. I am going to do something about it because I've grown impatient with their current situation and I can't stand seeing it happen anymore." Do you think he ever grows impatient with our situation? I can tell you he does, but it might not be how you think.

Our Old Testament lesson is going to help us explore God's impatience a little bit more today. Our lesson takes place during the time period of the judges in Israel. You might know the names of some of the more famous judges like Samson or Gideon, but we usually don't spend much time talking about the time period of the judges. The book of Judges takes place a little while after the Israelites had settled in the promised land of Canaan.

The stories of Judges usually go like this. The Israelites have a faithful leader who keeps them true to the Lord. This leader dies and the people stay close to the Lord for a little while, but soon fall away from him. The Lord becomes displeased with the Israelites and he hands them over to his enemies to discipline them. The Lord's discipline works after a while and the Israelites cry out to the Lord for help. The Lord hears their cry and he has mercy on them by sending a judge to rescue them.

We can see the pattern in our lesson today, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them."

"For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, 'We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals.'" The pattern is upheld and the scene is set for the Lord to send a judge to rescue the Israelites. But what happens?

"The LORD replied, 'When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!'" The Lord turns Israel away. Could this be God's impatient side I was talking about before?

I need tell a story about Jack before I get to my answer about God's impatience. Jack was a fairly successful man. He had a nice house with a boat and a hunting camp. Two kids he loved, but his life

always seemed like an endless crisis cycle. He broke his leg, his car got stolen, he was laid off from his job for a while, he had problems with his marriage, his kids started rebelling against him, one of his best friends died and on it went.

Every time something like this happened to Jack he would find himself praying more, going to church, talking to his pastor or Christian friends looking for advice, but when the crisis passed he would slowly stop coming to church, talking to his Christian friends and pastor and he would find his prayer life ceased. This would happen until the next crisis came along and he would find himself praying more, in church more and talking to his Christian friends more.

This cycle would repeat itself every few months or so and Jack was starting to get angry with all the troubles in his life. He asked his pastor, "Why does God have it in for me? It seems I just get done with one crisis and another one comes up. Why does he keep doing this to me? It isn't fair." Jack's pastor nodded because he understood where this was coming from. He could see the frustration on Jack's face, heard the pain in his voice.

Does your life and relationship with God ever mirror Jack's life? Does it take the pattern of being close to him, slowly starting to drift and grow apart, life goes into crisis mode, finding yourself coming back and getting close to God all the while wondering why your life seems to constantly be in crisis mode? Does it? Are you tempted to think your life is full of crisis because God is impatient with you and is out to get you? Maybe we need to hear how Jack's pastor answered his why questions from before.

"Jack, I noticed I only see you when your life is full of crisis. I see you in worship, we sit down and pray together and I know you talk to your Christian friends when your life is full of crisis. Do you think God might have a purpose for each crisis he sends you? It seems whenever your life, Jack, is full of crisis you are close to him, but whenever your latest crisis has passed you drift and wander away from him. Do you think God might be using these crises to remind you he wants to be a constant part of your life?"

Sometimes we forget how much God wants to be part of our lives. We like to set him on the shelf and make him part of our lives when it feels right to us, but God isn't happy with us when we do this. He wants to be part of more of our lives than a toy tucked away on a shelf somewhere which we pull out every couple of weeks or once a month to look at and sometimes he needs to use problems to discipline and remind us of this fact. Does he do this because he has grown impatient with us?

No, he does this out of patient love for us. He patiently uses problems in our lives to bring us closer to him. He uses them to remind us he is God and we aren't and thinking any other way is sin against him. What should we do when we convicted of this sin? Repent. James urges us, "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom."

What will happen when we repent of our sins? James tells us, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." The Lord will lift us up. We see this in our lesson today. The Lord appears to push Israel away and want nothing to do with them, but Israelites keeps relying on God's grace and mercy.

“But the Israelites said to the LORD, ‘We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now.’ Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD.”

The Holy Spirit reminded the Israelites of their past experiences with God. He showed them how the Lord was a God of free and faithful love who would forgive their sins. They placed their hope and confidence in God’s grace and mercy. How did God react? He saw his discipline had worked repentance into their hearts and they were sorry for their sins and “The Lord could bear Israel's misery no longer.” God couldn’t stand to see the Israelites suffering and miserable.

The word translated “weary” has an even deeper and more beautiful word picture in Hebrew. Literally it means “impatient”. Just think about that once. God wasn’t impatient with their rebellious attitude, but rather he patiently dealt with them to bring them to repentance, instead God became impatient with the suffering Israel was experiencing and he was going to do something about it. He sent a judge named Jephthah to come and rescue the people of Israel from their oppressors.

God feels this same way about our sins today too. He became impatient with sin and Satan and how it tried to take the world away from him. He didn’t patiently wait for us to try and come up with a solution to solve our sin, because he was impatient and he wanted a solution now because he was impatient with the punishment sin had brought upon us because the punishment it brought was eternal separation from him in hell.

God’s impatience with sin and its eternal punishment meant he would send his own son Jesus into this world to take God’s punishment over sin in our place. Jesus would take all of our sin on himself and he would satisfy God’s wrath over sin. He would do away with God’s impatience over sins eternal punishment and replace it with loving patience which calls us back to him and urges us to repent and stay close to him.

What a beautiful and amazing promise. God was impatient with the thought of having to send us to hell because of our sin so he sent his own son into this world to do away with sin. He has forgiven us for the times we make ourselves into God when we wander away from him by making him into a toy which we can put on a shelf, look at when we want to and have a relationship with him when we want to and not all the time like he wants to have with us.

This is great news, but we do need to face the reality we sometimes wander away from this truth. Our sinful nature fights against it and tries to do God’s job instead of letting him do it. When this happens God lovingly and patiently will discipline us. He will use these times to show us he is in control. What should we do when this happens? Repent and remember how God’s impatience with sins punishment has given you eternal life in Jesus. Amen.