



"Losing my Way" - Judges 17 - 18

by Pastor Tim Dodson at Jesus Fellowship of Believers
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In the Canadian Rockies, outside the town of Banff, is one of the greatest views of the mountains that is to be had. There is a gondola there that will ferry you to the top of the mountain for that perfect view. At the top, there is a tea house and a small

herd of mountain sheep. These sheep, as you might expect, have become rather tame over the years with all the tourists coming through, and have also acquired a real taste for the junk food that the tourists would bring with them. Over time, they have abandoned their diet of grass, and have instead engaged in daily begging and indulging in salty and sweet snacks of peanuts, popcorn, candy, and chips. As a result, the sheep's diets have been radically altered and thus so has their long term health, not to mention their reproductive abilities. They have lost weight, grown lethargic and unable to produce the milk needed for their offspring, when they manage to reproduce at all. Ultimately, the junk food is killing them. Not overnight. No, slowly...ever slowly over time, their diet has destroyed them and their future.

Those sheep are junk food junkies. And sadly, so are a lot of God's spiritual sheep. Such junk food is not immediately poisonous or destructive, but like those who are like those sheep, such has slowly and subtly altered our very beings and ruined our appetites for something better...something more nutritious. I wonder how many of us are in fact today spiritually starving? Not because we do not eat, but because what we consume has little or no real spiritual nutrition. No kingdom value. No impact upon our greater good.

For 16 chapters now we have followed the people of Israel...a people so greatly blessed, so miraculously redeemed, so intensely loved by their God. And yet for 16 chapters those same people have traveled in only increasingly tightening circles. A repetition of sin, bondage, repentance and humility, salvation, restoration, and sin again. It seemed that no matter how many times God warned them, or how many times God miraculously intervened, or how many times they were defeated and humiliated, they refused to learn the lesson of whole hearted obedience to God. While all the stories thus far seemed to have revolved around the redeemer and the redemption, as Judges moves toward its close, the stories seem to move rather toward a 'glimpse' of the world at that time and the heart of mankind. No more real heroes. No more grand stories of conquering through incredible odds and miraculous interventions. No, just sad stories of tacit religion and human survival. The people now bored, spiritually marginalized, and without real direction, God was 'going quiet.' Man would keep moving forward...but almost in perpetual motion now. No passion. No awe. No wonder.

What is the answer? Where is the smoking gun? It lies in verse 6 of chapter 17: "*For in those days, Israel had no King, so everyone did whatever he wanted to- whatever seemed right in his own eyes.*" This was not really a matter of overt sin...nor blatant rebellion against God. They just did what THEY thought was right in THEIR own eyes. No doubt most thought they were doing right...that they were ok in their actions and their living. This because their very value system...the core, the *foundation*, was corrupt. It was no longer merely an error, a stumble or a mistake. No, now it was a matter of deep inward cancer that was destroying their whole being

from the inside out. And so...as one commentary put it, we were left with nothing more than the 'swamp of relativism' that says both then and today "if it is right to you...in *your* eyes, then do it."

In this story, it's hard to keep track of just who the villain is. First there is Micah, who was a thief...who stole this silver from his own mother, and was only inclined to return it when he became fearful of his mother calling down curses upon the thief...whoever he might be. Then mom...once she got the silver back, was so happy that she promised to give it all to God, but she was a thief too...like mother like son I guess. Because when it came time to actually coughing up the dough, she gave only 200 shekels...and kept the rest for herself! What happened to the other 900 shekels? Then there was wayward priest that was a "hireling" to the max, who took a job being 'priest' over this man's house and his idols, all for a few bucks and the security of food and shelter. Micah becomes a full-on idolater with his little statues, in an effort to cover his backside from any of life's 'un-pleasantries.'

It wasn't that Micah did not know Jehovah was God. In that day, idols were commonly mixed with the worship of Jehovah, despite God's best efforts to stop it. All of this is more than disobedience. It was outright anarchy! Micah was practicing homemade worship of a manmade god. How sad. He was an early member of the 'home-church' movement. He wanted God "his-way!" The text tells us that all the while the 'house of God was in Shiloh.' If you were to look at the map you would find that Shiloh is an easy hike. It was not that the house of God was unreachable due to distance or war or something. No, Micah and his house...*and* his priest, just simply wanted to 'do God their own way.' Well, little has changed since Micah. Plenty of these folks here in our backyard! Those who want Jesus to be like a pez-dispenser...easy, convenient, fun and entertaining! The home-churchers, the no-churchers, the "we're-the-only-ones-who-are-right" churchers. Of course their very embrace of the practice of God herein literally negates God in power in their lives. They are merely playing house and pretending spiritual interaction.

This priest...*and I use the term loosely*, set out to find where his 'god-job' could best serve him and his well being. For this guy, this was not a calling but rather a career that he sought to better his life. Please note that he went out with no place to land. That is the absolute handprint of spiritual error. This was wrong on so many levels! Yet how many of us take off for fame and fortune because a job op is calling, and we never seek the more important aspect of a church community and the very calling and directions of God? We seek to get God on board with our plans and goals, not to get onto HIS. That would mean that YOU are your God and the real God is supposed to be your servant. That's idolatry and you are therefore just like this priest. This sad little man...

This man was apparently dissatisfied with God's arrangements for his life. He wanted God, but he wanted what HE wanted too! It like those of us that connect with the community of God, but still go out and pursue unbiblical relationships, unscriptural living, vocational pursuits contrary to his design for us, and a life of 'dabbling' in worldliness on the edge of the kingdom realm.

Often I drive along and see free-roaming chickens pecking on the shoulder of the highway. They are from a nearby farm and are just pecking along, but they are dancing just as close to destruction as they possible can and get away with it. How many from our own family here have fallen because they did they same thing? How many of us were hit by the proverbial bus because we arrogantly thought we were special?

One of Satan's most subtle but successful tactics is to get a Christian dissatisfied with his or her life-circumstances and the area of service God has assigned them. Pride and jealousy slowly rise to overcome any humility and spiritual sense. When it becomes about you, *it's over*. You are a dead man walking...

Oh how we know this drill! "*I am not getting as much attention as that person. They don't talk to me. They don't see my abilities and talents. The pastor ignores me. I can do what they do and in fact, I can do it better than them! I'm tired of these people being nosy into my life! etc etc.*" But all that Micah needed to do really was to find someone as selfish and conniving as he was, because of course 'birds of a feather, flock together!' It was "*hey! Let's start our own church! We don't all those other people who don't recognize how great we are!*" Obviously these guys did not realize the danger of the fire they were playing with. In Number 16, a guy named Korah tried to act like a priest and God opened up the ground and swallowed him up! Then, the icing on the cake was that Micah's 'loyal priest' threw him under the bus the moment that a 'better deal' came along. What? No honor amongst thieves? Apparently not! That's what happens. I know of whole 'churches' (again, 'loose term') that form through the hatred and self-centered acts of individuals that find other individuals like them. The "enemy of my enemy is my friend" right? And eventually however, they eat each other alive like a bunch of hungry wolves caged up together with no real food to eat. The whole show seems like a Saturday Night Live skit. A parody of the real thing.

What's the lesson here for us? Well, are you looking for *a* place or *God's* place? Can you find contentment in the place God has for you and *what* He has for you, or are you trying to get God on *your* train? Is all that you are here at this church for about *you*? Are you ultimately serving yourself?

Then lastly, there is the tribe of Dan. After Moses, these boys were given the land inheritance between Ephraim and Judah, but in battle for their inheritance, they failed to drive the enemy out. So, instead of trusting God and remaining faithful, they decided to look for a new place to live that was easier, more comfortable, and was easy pickings. Instead of remaining where God called them, they chose to go where it would be easier and where they could look like warriors went they really weren't. Because this land they were taking was essentially a bunch of old ladies and children. Nice people who weren't set up to fight. So instead of being obedient and going to war in the hand of God, they went instead and fought against a bunch of innocent folks were looking to just live in peace.

So the tribe of Dan...instead of going to a *real* priest at a *real* church, instead go get this pseudo-priest and hire him. Now this priest has a better gig, with people who really appreciate his talents, ...so he steals Micah's little toy gods and splits. Man does this sound incredibly familiar! It's so tempting to religiously 'blaze our own trail', but it ends badly every time, and you will end up huddled in a fetal position in a corner someplace or bursting out the door like the last scene of "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." Just blowing out the door in a spiritual suicide "last shootout."

Look, if you want to live in spiritual Laish, you must be an idol-worshipper. Because no real Christian can live a life of ease. I know it's tempting to try. It's so tempting to carve out our own spiritual-religious world...one of our own invention where there are different laws of nature and physics. A comfortable always fun place to be and everyone lives happy like Dr. Seuss's "Who-ville." But the real world is not like that. And no amount of pretending will change that undeniable fact.

In the book of 1 Chronicles, when the list of tribes and families were given, Dan was the only tribe that was totally ignored. Quite likely because they were simply **gone**. Absorbed into intermarriage with the Philistines and lost in the gray of time. Vanished into obscurity. They tried to take what God had not given them and ultimately lost not only **that**, but **everything**.

In Revelation, where the 144,000 Hebrew believers that are being assigned 'special duty' for God in the crescendo of history, Dan is nowhere to be found. They rejected God's earthly assignment and were now being passed up for the greater heavenly assignment. Missing the greatest of blessings. Their destiny missed. Their purpose lost.

"There is a way which seems right unto a man, but its end is the way of death." Proverbs 14:12. It doesn't matter how good the food tastes if its still only junk food. It may be sweet to the tongue, but meaningless to our living, and in fact contributes only to our dying. Remember...*you are what you eat...*