

Devotion 10:

Our Father Disciplines and Delivers His Children

Judges 1—21

A former colleague of mine tells a delightfully human story of when he was a teenager in western Nebraska. As he tells it, he hopped a freight train one winter night and headed for a distant town to visit a girl friend. What he didn't anticipate, however, is that the train did not slow down when it arrived at the fair maiden's town. It sped past going much too quickly for a safe jump from the boxcar. And the train continued at that same speed past more towns into southeastern Wyoming!

After a few hours, the train finally slowed in some small rural hamlet. After jumping safely, he walked around the quiet town. By that hour of the night, every store was locked up. He finally came across a gas station that had an outdoor telephone booth. He scrounged in his pockets, found enough coins, and made the most shame-filled call of his life to his father. His father calmly told him to stay put and that he would drive the several hours, now through heavy snowfall, and pick him up. I guess the ride home was unnervingly quiet!

My colleague liked to tell this story in our school's chapels where we taught. He said he learned much about our heavenly Father that night through the actions of his earthly father. The story comes to mind as I finish reading Judges.

I believe Judges can easily be summarized like this: *"Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers....They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them."* (2:11-12) *"In his anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them....Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders."* (2:14, 16)

And notice what some of the judges were like: a woman, soldiers who merely blew trumpets and broke clay jars, and a captured blind man. Leave it to our Father to show that His power is made perfect in our weakness. (II Cor. 12:9)

I envision a father watching his child do what he was told not to do, spanking the disobedient child, fixing what was broken or cleaning up the mess, then picking up the child and holding him. The scene reoccurs about 14 times in the book of Judges.

We shake our heads in arrogant self-righteousness and say to ourselves, "Those stupid Israelites. What were they thinking? If I had seen God perform miraculous deeds and actually talk directly to me, I think I would respond a little more reverently." Oh, really? What did God say to you in last Sunday's sermon at church? Do you even remember what He said? What have you read from Him lately in His 66 love letters to you? Have you disobeyed what you clearly know to be His will on this or that?

Is there anyone in your life that you are not forgiving? Have you slandered anyone lately? Are your motives behind all that you do and say totally pure and other-centered? Do you really live more for our Father's joy and pleasure rather than your own?

Take heart. There is Good News for us. Our Father is not neglectful. *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.”* (Heb. 12:7, 10) *“A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.”* (Ps. 34:19)

The story of Israel in Judges is a painful reminder of our story today: sin, consequences, grace; sin, consequences, grace. Praise God. Our Father sent one final and ultimate Judge to deliver us from the flesh, the devil, and the world. Praise God that when we eat His body and drink His blood in holy communion, we are reminded of being delivered once and for all from sin's condemnation and eternal death.