

The Sunday School Lesson

by Beacie Wilbon

INTRODUCTION:

There are good people in politics, people whose intentions are honorable and whose influence is wholesome, people who try to end corruption and promote the welfare of all who are under their jurisdiction.

But there are also people in politics for what they can get out of it. Sincere concern for the welfare of the people they govern is replaced by concern for their own advancement. The seizure of power takes precedence over services to the populace. These greedy persons go into politics for purely selfish reasons.

This insincerity is not peculiar to the twentieth century. In this week's lesson we see a qualified and worthy man declining the kingship of his people and an unworthy man seeking it - and finding much support.

Following their victory over the Midianites, the Israelites wanted to make Gideon their king. But Gideon refused, saying that the Lord was the one who should rule over them. Although he was not their king, Gideon did exert great influence over Israel for forty years. During that period, some of the abuses associated with kingship began to creep in.

First, Gideon made an ephod out of gold earrings taken from the slain Midianites, and it came to be regarded almost as an idol. An ephod was part of the Jewish high priest's garments. To it was attached the breastplate with the mysterious Urim and Thummim by which the will of God was revealed. (Read Exodus 28: 6-30)

Second, following the practice of kings, Gideon had many wives, which was in direct violation of the law. We are not told how many wives he had, but it's known that he fathered seventy sons. (Judges 8:30) There is no mention of the daughters who may have been born to him. Gideon had also a female slave from Shechem, who became his concubine, a second-class wife. She also bore him a son named Abimelech.

Although Gideon's spiritual and moral examples were not what they should have been still Israel did not turn to the worship of Baal

THE LESSON:

"Gideon's son Abimelech went to the town of Shechem, where all his mother's relatives lived, and told them to ask the men of Shechem, 'which would you prefer? To have all seventy of Gideon's sons govern you or to have just one man? Remember that Abimelech is your own flesh and blood.' His mother's relatives talked to the men of Shechem about this for him, and the men of Shechem decided to follow Abimelech because he was their relative. They gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-of-the-Covenant, and with this money he hired a bunch of worthless scoundrels to join him. He went to his father's house at Ophrah, and there on top of a single stone he killed his seventy brothers, Gideon's sons. But Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, hid and was not killed. Then all the men of Shechem and Bethmillo got together and went to the sacred oak tree at Shechem, where they made Abimelech king. When Jotham heard about this, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim and shouted out to them, 'Listen to me, you men of Shechem, and God may listen to you!' Once upon a time the trees went out to choose a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' The olive tree answered, 'In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my oil, which is used to honor gods and men. Then the tree said to the fig tree, 'You come and be our king. But the fig tree answered, 'In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my good sweet fruit.' So the trees then said to the grapevine, 'You come and be our king. But the vine answered, 'In order to govern you, I would have to stop producing my wine that makes gods and men happy. So then all the trees said to the thorn bush, 'You come and be our king.' The thorn bush answered, 'If you really want to make me your king, then come and take shelter in my shade. If you don't fire will blaze out of my thorny branches and burn up the cedars of Lebanon.' (Judges 9: 1-15)

The thorn bush wanted to be sure the trees were serious and that its authority would be absolute. So it demanded that the trees put their trust in its shadow. How absurd, to see tall, beautiful trees bending low to find shelter under a lowly thorn bush! But if the trees refused, then the bramble would proceed to destroy them. Sometimes whole forests were wiped out by fires that began in the scrub bushes of the area. The bramble warned that such would be the fate of the trees if they did not accept its rule.

Whether Jotham's fable was inspired or not, it proved to be prophetic. After Abimelech had ruled three years, rebellion was stirred up in Shechem. Abimelech brought his troops, crushed the rebellion, and destroyed the city. When one thousand men and women took refuge in a hold of the temple of Baal, Abimelech set the hold on fire, killing everyone in it. Then he went to take over another city, but there he got too close to the citadel while he was attempting to burn it down. A woman threw a heavy stone down from the top of the wall and broke his skull. With a last flash of pride, Abimelech ordered one of his men to kill him so it could never be said that a woman had done him in. Thus, amid tumult, flames, cries, and bloodshed, Abimelech came to his violent end. His life is a vivid illustration of Jesus' statement that those who take sword shall perish by the sword.

The book of Judges gives us several examples of what God can do for and through His people when they really trust Him. But there are many more instances when we are appalled to read of broken faith, betrayal of trust, the repudiation of God's way, and the excesses of human passion and pride.

Again and again Jesus and the New Testament writers urge us to "beware" of various evils. (Matt. 7:15; Luke 12:15; Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:8; Peter 3:17). We are not to "give heed" to fables or to seducing spirits, but to give "earnest heed" that our Christian standing not "slip" away from us.

The light of Christ's life, way, and truth helps us see how dark were the days of judges. It also reveals to us the darkness of our day, too, apart from Him.

Father, help us to yield ourselves to you, that Your grace may conquer our cruelty, Your peace overcome our unrest, and Your purity cleanse our stains. In Jesus name, Amen.

Do You Know Christ?

By J. M. Little

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; for whom I (J. M. Little) am chief." (I Tim. 1:15). Christ died for J. M. Little. Brother Paul said He was the chief of sinners and that Christ died for him. I am glad I also can claim title and say "Christ died for me." It's "sinner" and Christ. Are you a sinner? In response one will say; "I'm a member of Deep Creek

Baptist Church," another, "I belong to Northside" and, "I've been a member of THE HOUSE OF PRAYER all my life." Alright, I'll deal with you just as truthfully and tenderly as I know how. If those are your only responses when I ask you if you know Christ, then that is concrete evidence you do not know Christ. And for you to remain where you are means that Hell will be your home! When you come to depart this life your having been a Baptist, Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, or the fact you went to the House of Prayer 7 nights a week won't help you one bit! It's knowing Christ as your Lord and your Saviour that will see you safely across the chilly waters of death. If you don't know Christ, having been religious to the core as many of you are, will be all that much more kindling wood to burn you in Hell. Now you can criticize me all you want to for being true to you. I know your blind and deceived state. I weep for you. You are lost and don't know it.

When I was growing up as a boy in the religious world I didn't know I was a sinner in need of salvation. I read my Bible religiously. In the early sixties, I wrote a letter to my cousin, Lib Allen, who lived in Lilesville, some 12 miles away and told her that I knew I was alright as long as I didn't do anything wrong to my fellow man. What a blind state I was in. I was trying to live a Christian life out of Christ. Let's just examine my old religious heart and life for just a little. Here was J. M. Little, a devout Bible student, who would not miss a service on Sunday if I could help it, teaching the Bible class, boasting that I didn't live in sin as other men did. Patting myself on the back that "I harm nobody." I'd go to other churches, and was glad to have the opportunity to speak at religious meetings. I was looked upon as a "model boy" in the community.

What about that, preacher, deacon? You would say, and many did; "surely Brother Little is saved." Was I? Can an individual keep himself unspotted from the world, be a devout Bible student and teacher and still be lost? What about it, Brother Gatewood? Yes, I was all those things and others but had never known that I was a sinner.

Now, have you ever seen yourself as a sinner? Christ died for sinners! I'm not talking about making a little profession that you are a sinner and walking down to the front and giving the preacher your hand. No! Multitudes do that and go out into eternity and wake up in Hell. I'm talking about being awakened to the fact you are a lost sinner and seeing your far-off distance from a thrice Holy God and you see yourself helpless to get to Christ and that no man can help you, have you ever seen yourself as such a sinner? I'm talking about seeing your totally depraved, ruined, helpless, doomed and damned condition as a child of the Devil. Have you seen this? If you haven't, then you are not the sinner for whom Christ died. You'll never get to Heaven on a flowery bed of ease.

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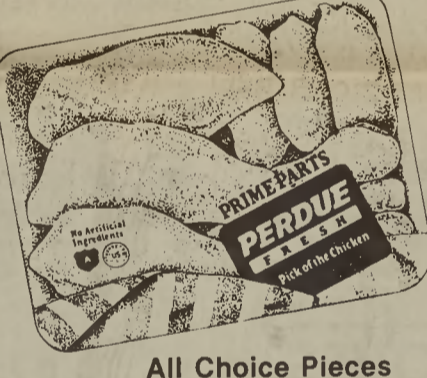
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