

GOD REPAID THE WICKEDNESS!

Judges 9:1-57 (Key Verse 56-57)

"Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father

by murdering his seventy brothers God also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them."

From last week's message we learnt how God was with the Israelites, giving them peace in the land for about 40 years, we also learnt that Gideon their Judge whom God had called out to save them lived until a good old age. However, after his death the Israelites did not waste any time but went ahead prostituting themselves to Baal, this time it was even worse. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies. Furthermore, they also failed to show kindness to the family of Gideon for all the good things he had done for them. And now in today's passage the situation became worse, Gideon's own son Abimelech together with the people of Shechem acted wickedly before the eyes of the Lord. Therefore, through today's passage we are going to learn in detail about their wickedness and how they became wicked. We are also going to learn how God responds to wickedness. I pray that God may be with us to receive one word so that we can be alert and clear of any forms of wickedness so that we can live lives pleasing before the eyes of God.

As today's passage begins, we meet Abimelech Son of Gideon, whose mother was a concubine. Now the meaning of Abimelech was "**My father is a king**" also, even though Gideon refused to be a king of the Israelites and rule over them, his lifestyle suggested that he is a king, he had many wives, he wore garments worn by kings. So, when his son Abimelech saw all this, an ambition rose in his heart to one day become a king. However, when his father died, his dream seemed far from reach, because his mother was a concubine and he had 70 other brothers whom their mothers were not concubines but wives of Gideon. In real terms the 70 brothers were rightful heirs, if a king should be raised it would be one of them. But because Abimelech was so hungry for the position, he did all it takes to be king, he went to his mother's brothers in Shechem and said to them and to all his mother's clan: *"Ask all the citizens of Shechem, 'Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man?' Remember, I am your flesh and blood."*

When the people of Shechem heard all this, they supported Abimelech's idea and Ambition, they too did all it takes to have Abimelech to be king because he is their blood, only because he is related to them. They never considered if he is the suitable king, they did not consider even the will of God in this situation. To make things worse they took money from the temple of Baal-Berith, money offered to idols to fund Abimelech's campaign to be crowned king. And with both hands Abimelech accepted and took seventy shekels offered to idols and went ahead to hire reckless scoundrels who became his followers. To be king he used just about anything and anyone, it was very clear that those men he was hiring were reckless crooks, but he hired them to follow him and be his men. And to finally to get what he wanted, Abimelech went to his father's home in Ophrah and on one stone murdered his 69 brothers, with only Jotham, the youngest son escaping the tragedy by running into hiding. After Abimelech had done this, the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem and crowned Abimelech as king. How could Abimelech do this? How could the citizens of Shechem accept this and even crown Abimelech after doing this?

They did all this because of selfish ambition, becoming king was all about power, influence and position in society. This was the same with the people of Shechem, they thought if they have Abimelech as king then they would benefit more than other people, they thought Abimelech would give them special treatment. Both Abimelech and the people of Shechem only had themselves in mind, they never considered God, they never considered other people, how other people are affected by all this, that is why they could easily spill blood of innocent people. This kind of behaviour we see even today, many people do things just for themselves, spiritual leaders, political leaders, leaders in the working environment are only concerned about their own selfish ambitions, instead of serving people and most importantly being led by the will of God. Because of this behaviour, many young people have been led to believe that in order to succeed, they too need to have selfish ambitions, they are being led to believe that this is the only way to survive. But from today's passage we can see that this kind behaviour is so dangerous, because of selfish ambition, Abimelech and the people Shechem spilled blood of the 69 innocent sons of Gideon. Their selfish ambitions led them to wickedness. Because of this selfish ambition the people of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered and beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem and crowned Abimelech as king. This was a very sacred place, where God established a covenant with the Israelites, and they contaminated it with their selfish ambition, they thought sugar coating their wickedness by crowning Abimelech at this place will make things better. But this only revealed their deep sin and wickedness before the Lord.

And when Jotham the survived son of Gideon heard about this wickedness, he did not hesitate but climbed up on the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted: *"Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you"* and thereafter he revealed and told them straight their problem through a parable of trees. He started first in **verse 8-15**:

"8 One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' 9 "But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' 10 "Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' 11 "But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' 12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' 13 "But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and humans, to hold sway

over the trees?' 14 "Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' 15 "The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'"

Here Jotham revealed to the people what kind of a king Abimelech is, he revealed to them what kind of a king the people of Shechem had crowned. He was very clear that indeed Abimelech was not suitable king. In Israel at the time there were many people who at least had something to offer, beautiful fruits like the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine tree. These men and woman understood their position as God's servants, they did not want to rule over Israel like Abimelech but rather they wanted to serve the people, they wanted to please, honor and give glory to God by producing fruits. Abimelech on the other hand did not want to serve the people, he did not want to glorify and honour God with his life but just wanted rule over the people, he wanted to exploit the people, he wanted to suppress them. Just like the thornbush, he had nothing to offer to the people, he was useless, he could not even provide shade, but only brought tormenting pains like thorns on the people's flesh. To make matters worse, under Abimelech's rule no one will have a choice but to come under his tormenting rule, everyone had surrender to Abimelech's rule, otherwise everyone burns. In **verse 16** it says: "*The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'"*"

I believe Jotham said all these words led by the spirit of God, God wanted both Abimelech and the people Shechem to assess themselves and their actions. He wanted them to repent from their wickedness of doing things out of self-ambition, he wanted them to repent from overlooking the will and purpose of God in their lives. Furthermore, God was so gracious to them revealing to them the consequence of wickedness and giving them the opportunity to repent. In **verse 19-20** Jotham asked them: "*So have you acted honorably and in good faith toward Jerub-Baal and his family today? If you have, may Abimelech be your joy, and may you be his, too! /But if you have not, let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!*" Through this God revealed the consequence of wickedness, God revealed that wickedness cannot be overlooked, but it is punishable by fire.

Even after this great warning from God, Abimelech and the people of Shechem still did not repent, they did not assess themselves and turn back from their ways of wickedness. God gave them a chance for 3 years and still they continued with their ways, ruled over by Abimelech. But because God hates sin and does not overlook wickedness, the curse of Jotham fell upon Abimelech and the people Shechem. In **verse 23-24** it says: "*God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech. God did this in order that the crime against Jerub-Baal's seventy sons, the shedding of their blood, might be avenged on their brother Abimelech and on the citizens of Shechem, who had helped him murder his brothers.*" From here on war broke out in the land, the people of Shechem opposed Abimelech and stirred up his anger. They put their confidence in Gaal son of Ebed who stirred them up saying: "*Who is Abimelech, and why should we Shechemites be subject to him? Isn't he Jerub-Baal's son, and isn't Zebul his deputy? Serve the family of Hamor, Shechem's father! Why should we serve Abimelech? If only this people were under my command! Then I would get rid of him. I would say to Abimelech, 'Call out your whole army!'"*

When Abimelech learnt all this, he gathered his troops and went after Gaal chasing him all the way to the entrance gate and many were killed as they fled. Abimelech chased Gaal and his clan out of Shechem. War continued between Abimelech and the people of Shechem, he attacked the city until he had captured it and killed its people and scattered salt over it. The people of the tower of Shechem ran off into the stronghold of the temple of El-Berith, and when Abimelech saw this he cut branches together with his troops and piled it onto the stronghold and set it on fire with people in it and all people in it died. He moved on to Thebez, besieged and captured it, here too he wanted to burn down the people who had ran off into their strong tower. But as he was approaching the tower, a woman was amongst the people of Thebez who ran off to the roof and dropped a millstone on Abimelech's head and cracked his skull. To rid the shame of being killed by a woman, Abimelech requested his sword bearer to run him through with a sword and kill him. And this was the end of Abimelech's life, he died a shameful death, and nothing special about his rule was recorded.

When I look at this passage I cannot help but see our world today, the actions of Abimelech and the people Shechem are no different from our actions today. Just like Abimelech and the people Shechem, God saved me and you from the oppressions and power of our enemies, God sent his one and only son Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that sin may no longer have power over me and you, so that we may live with peace. When I was in high school I witnessed how sin destroyed my parents marriage, a great shame it was for me to grow up in those circumstances. Things became even hard at the school playgrounds; I could not talk about both my parents in one sentence because they were living apart. I had to live with my relatives and each day my self-esteem declined because I thought this is not my father's house. I lived with anger, I resorted to studying very hard to teach those who looked down on me a lesson, and to be happy. And in time my dream came true, I graduated with an Engineering Degree from Wits. But sadly, nothing changed, I was still not entirely happy, people still made me angry, and nobody cared that I have an Engineering degree from Wits, and this frustrated me so much. But by God's grace, at that very point Jesus found me, and showed me through Bible study that my joy comes from him, that only he is my Savior. Jesus revealed to me my sin of selfish ambition, my sin of self will. Through Bible study I learnt that without Jesus my ambitions will only lead me to destruction. And since then God raised me through Shepherd Jacob's family to rather be a servant of God, serve God through serving others especially through teaching the word of God.

I really thank God for even though I am not perfect, even today I still have a privilege of participating in his salvation work. I pray that I may continuously repent from selfish ambitions, especially nowadays I have been thinking a lot about how to take care of my family in the future and my career direction. I pray that I may put God first, put everything in his care and trust, surrender my will and purpose unto Jesus to lead me and guide through all things.

Conclusion

From today's passage we have learnt that selfish ambition does greater harm than good, because of selfish ambition Abimelech and the people of Shechem did wickedness before the eyes of God. **And what was the result of this?** Let us look at the **key verse (56-57)**: *"Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. /God also made the people of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them."* God did not overlook the wickedness, because He is just, He repaid the wickedness, to establish peace in the land he gave to the Israelites. Selfish ambition is destroying many gifted young people, it is destroying many nations, and people seem to still have no problem with doing wicked things to achieve their goals. Let us pray for repentance, for God is just and will not overlook wickedness.