I. INTRODUCTION

A. Joshua was a book about walking in victory, Judges is a book about defeat

1. Summarizes Israel’s complete failure as a nation
2. Joshua ended with Israel being presented with a choice – to serve the one true God or to serve false gods
   a) “now therefore choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve”
   b) Joshua makes it clear that his household will serve the Lord, but he says you must choose for yourselves
3. All the people replied – “we will serve the Lord!” What Joshua said next was kind of shocking – “you can’t. You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God.”
4. Strange response to Israel’s pledge of devotion, but Joshua understood something about his fellow Israelites. He saw something unfolding that would send them on a downward spiral of destruction

B. As the people gathered together and pledged their loyalty to the one true God, he knew what waited for them in their tents

1. “He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.” “Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel”
2. Remain faithful to the covenant they made with God - You will be my people and I will be your God - blessing to all nations and reflecting to all the other nations what God is like
   a) But If you turn away from God and worship the false gods of the Canaanites God will not sit by idly while you desecrate His name

II. THE COMPROMISES BEGIN

A. The book seems to start well

1. **Jud 1:1** Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, “Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?” 2 And the Lord said, “Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand.”

2. That’s about as far as we get. There are minor victories here and there but what we see in verse 16 and 21 becomes far more common for the Israelites
a) **Jud 1:16** Now the children of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which lies in the South near Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

b) **Jud 1:21** But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

c) **Jud 1:27** However, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land.

d) The rest of the chapter is a list of the Canaanites that Israel failed to drive out of the Promised Land

B. The purpose of driving out the Canaanites

1. Avoid adopting their moral corruption and pagan practices – ways of worship including child sacrifice
2. Joshua saw the beginning signs of idolatry. A word I’m hesitant to use because we disconnect it from our day to day lives. False worship.
   a) Worship - What we determine is worthy of our time, attention, and resources
3. Joshua saw that the people were already being influenced by outside affections – so his message in his last days was – now therefore, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve

C. Lest we think this is strictly an Old Testament message for an Old Testament people let’s think about Paul’s letter to the Romans

1. Strikingly similar to Joshua’s final message to the nation of Israel
2. I am a firm believer when we teach our children about following Jesus, we must establish the depths of God’s love for us even when we were sinners (idolators) and the certainty of His faithfulness before we tell them what they must do
3. At any age, we must learn who God is and what He has done and then from that we will know what we must do – God is not only worthy, He is supremely worthy
4. That is what Joshua did in our study of chapter 24, and that is exactly what Paul is doing in his letter to the Romans
   a) Romans 1 - 4 – Mankind is sinful, wholly unrighteous, deserving of the wrath and judgement of a perfect God. In desperate need of salvation. God, because of His patience and His loving kindness has made provision for our salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. Using Abraham as an example, the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us when we believe Christ’s finish work on the cross
   b) Romans 5 – 8 Paul explains that with salvation comes freedom
      1) Freedom from God’s wrath, freedom from the bondage of sin, freedom from the righteous requirement of the law, and freedom from death itself
   c) Romans 9 – 11 Paul echoes Joshua’s sentiment – salvation is a work the Spirit of God, not a work of the flesh
It can’t be earned, it can’t be won through human effort, and it isn’t deserved – that isn’t a new gospel! Same story we see in the Old Testament – God’s grace poured out on an undeserving people – that isn’t a new gospel! Same story we see in the Old Testament – God’s grace poured out on an undeserving people.

If we attempt to live by the law, we will die by law.

And then, it is 12 chapters into Paul’s letter that he writes

1. **Rom 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (act of worship) 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2. Now, therefore, in light of all that God has done - fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth – in light of all that God is – give all that you are to Him.

   a) Because God can be trusted – that is what our children need to see and to hear.

3. Once that is made clear then, as Joshua makes clear, a decision has to be made.

III. ISRAEL’S DISOBEDIENCE

A. Chapter 2 is an overview of the choice Israel makes and the consequences of that choice.

**Jud 2:1** Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: “I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you. 2 And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? 3 Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.’” 4 So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.

**Jud 2:11** Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; 12 and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. 13 They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. 14 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. 15 Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed. 16 Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

A. Judges – tribal leaders that ruled over the Israelites. Not your typical courtroom judge, more of a tribal chieftain – a leader of each individual tribes military

1. Even the Judges started out well but slowly degraded into moral depravity.

17 Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so. 18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their
enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. 19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

2. This is a summary of the cycle we see with the nation of Israel that carries on throughout the entirety of the Old Testament.

3. Starts with compromise and sinful idol worship that leads them into bondage and oppression. Repentance and cries for forgiveness. God raises up a deliverer to set them free. They use their freedom as an opportunity to sin – and the cycle continues

B. How did they go from a victorious nation living in the presence of the one true God to a corrupt nation marked by violence, sexual prevision, and moral failure?

1. All comes back to that central question - who will you serve – who will you worship – who will you adore

2. Choose – it is a choice, a decision has to be made. Love isn’t something you fall into, love is moment by moment decisions about what is important. What we choose to invest our most precious resource in – time.
   a) Our commitment and devotion to the Lord will not happen by accident, not choosing is a choice

3. For yourselves – it is our decisions, not our parents or our pastors or our friends – it is ours. No one will make that decision for us and there will be no one to blame at the end of it all

4. This day – not tomorrow, not when you are older, not when you retire, not when it is convenient, not when you are finished with this sin – this day. Today is the day of salvation
   a) Benjamin Franklin once said “You may delay, but time will not, and lost time is never found again.”
   b) It’s also been said “Don’t put off for tomorrow what you can do today because if you enjoy it today, you can do it again tomorrow.”

5. Whom you will serve - not if you will serve, but whom you will serve
   a) The decision isn’t will you worship or adore someone, it is who. Everybody worships. We are creatures of worship. But what or who we worship is the question.
   b) David Foster Wallace - A famous American author and English professor understood this in part when he gave a now famous commencement address at Kenyon College “Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship...is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. If you worship your body and beauty and sexual allure, you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. On one level, we all know this already. It's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, epigrams, parables; the skeleton of every great story. The whole trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness.”
Went on to say “But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they’re evil or sinful, it’s that they’re unconscious…They’re the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that’s what you’re doing. And the so-called real world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings, because the so-called real world of men and money and power hums merrily along in a pool of fear and anger and frustration and craving and worship of self.”

He was so close to understanding this Biblical truth, but he tragically took his life at the age of 46 after struggling for years with depression.

Anyone who has studied human behavior on any level has come to the same conclusion that Mr. Wallace has – it’s not if we worship but what

1. Everyone will choose to be ruled by some deep desire, or principle, or passion, or some philosophy – that is alter at which they will bend their knee
2. Professor of Psychology Matt Rossano wrote “I’m sympathetic to the view that humans will, either by design or default, end up worshipping some god, if by god we mean ‘that to which we willingly offer service and sacrifice in exchange for a sense of meaning and purpose.'”
3. The false god of our time is obvious – nothing has changed – the common thread throughout Judges - In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

IV. THE ISSUE OF IDOLATRY

A. That is the reality that mankind is faced with and what ultimately determines the trajectory of our lives

1. Will we discover and accept the reality that God is the only thing worthy of our complete adoration and service or will give that attention and affection to something that can’t bare the weight of it
2. Despite the hopelessness of the book of Judges there is a glimmer of hope – that one-day God will send a great and final deliverer – and unlike Israel’s human deliverers, His deliverance will be complete
   a) Just like Joshua explained – God is faithful to His word even when we ae not – and He sent us a deliverer - His Son Jesus Christ
   b) Romans 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”
   c) But we have to make a choice. Worship what is worthy of our time, attention and resources or worship lesser gods made with human hands
3. Judges is a book about destruction brought on by misplaced worship and affection. It’s the other side of the coin to the book of Joshua.
   a) There is victory in allowing God to take His rightful place. But we cannot even comprehend the wickedness we are capable of when something else occupies that seat in our lives.