

Place: Lurgan Baptist 14:1:2003

Reading: Judges 8:22 9:6

HEARTS OF IRON, FEET OF CLAY

8. THE RENEGADE WHO LUSTED FOR POWER

Five days after Charles Spurgeon trusted the Lord Jesus and knew the assurance of salvation, he came crashing back to earth. Since the Sunday of his conversion, he had been so filled with the joy of his new life that he seemed to be walking in mid air. Then, on Friday, an awful realisation exploded in his consciousness. *He still had some very sinful thoughts and desires which he did not understand.* After all, he was now a Christian. He had no doubt that he was trusting entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ, but those sinful desires distressed him. On Sunday he went back to the same little church where he had trusted Christ, anxious to find answer. When the preacher turned to Romans Chapter 7 and read Paul's description of his inner conflict and struggle, with sin, Spurgeon was sure that the Lord meant this message just for him. Then the preacher began to expound the passage.

He said, "*Paul was not a believer when he wrote Romans Chapter 7,*" and he went on to say that no child of God felt any inner conflict. Spurgeon was so sure that the man was wrong that he picked up his hat

and left the church in the middle of the message, never to return. Later on, he wrote of churches that teach that doctrine of the Christian life, "*They are very good for people who are unconverted to go to, but of very little use for the children of God They are like the parish pound, it is a good place to put the sheep in when they've strayed, but there is no food inside, they had better be let out as soon as possible to find grass.*" Years later, Spurgeon was a speaker at a conference, along with another man, who publicly proclaimed that Christians could reach a place of sinless perfection where they no longer struggled with sin or had any desire to sin because they were perfected in the love of God.

The speaker went on to suggest that he had realised this in his own life. Spurgeon said nothing, but the next morning, at breakfast time, he crept up behind the man and poured a jug of milk on his head. He quickly discovered that the man still had his sinful nature. Now Spurgeon's method of testing a man's doctrine may be rather unorthodox, but it does face us with a very important fact of Christian experience. A Christian is a person who knows an inner struggle, a struggle with sin, and often finds himself engaged in a civil war within his own being. That does not mean that a Christian does not experience victory. By God's grace, he does. But it is a victory in the midst of conflict, not a victory over conflict, and it is both naive and dangerous to ignore or minimise the nature of the inner battle which we all face until the Lord calls us home. Now (Judges Ch 9) provides us with an opportunity to examine that civil war.

There are significant parallels between God's principles of physical warfare and His principles of spiritual warfare. We have noted that most of the enemies during the period of the Judges are external, invading foreigners such as Moab, the Midianites, or the Philistines, but in the story of Abimelech, Gideon's son we have an account of internal division and conflict.

The "key," to this story is the word "throne." Abimelech wanted to occupy the throne, he wanted to be king. Now in order to understand the passage, I want you to note three things about the throne. At the end of (CH 8) we have:

(1) AN EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE THRONE

Do you recall the people's request to Gideon ? (8:22-23) This idea for Gideon to be King was outside the will of God. It was an idea that Israel had borrowed from their pagan neighbours. You see, Israel was the only nation in the near east at that time that did not have a human king. *Why ?* Because God Himself was King in Israel. (Deut 33:5) My God meant Israel to be a *Theocracy* a nation led and ruled by God Himself rather than by an earthly king. Later in their history Israel would have a visible king, but at this point Israel was to be a Theocracy. You see, Gideon's response to the people's request was right. (8:23) Unfortunately, while Gideon refused the kingship he adopted a very kingly lifestyle, which became the

means of leading the people back into idolatry. So much so, that at the end of (CH 8) we see Gideon and Israel having an external relationship with the throne ! I wonder does, that characterise your relationship with the Lord ? Is it external, formal, mechanical ? Are you just going through the motions but your heart is far from God ? (1) You see, if you look at (Ch 8) you'll notice:

(a) *THE ROOT OF DEFECTION IS SEEN IN GIDEON:*

For while Gideon refused the Kingship, he wanted the Priesthood. Did you notice (8:27) ? " *And Gideon made an ephod thereof.*" Now the ephod was the symbol of the office of the High Priest and when the High Priest in Israel put on the ephod it was because he wanted to know the will of God. Now not once in the book of Judges do we ever read of the High Priest functioning and providing spiritual leadership for the people, so Gideon thought he would fulfil the vacuum. My this ephod episode was the beginning of Gideon's decline. What a sad ending ! ***Its good to start well, its better to go on well, its best to finish well.*** But as you view the concluding days of Gideon you see the root of defection. For one thing:

1. His PRACTICE contradicted his PROFESSION:

For the man who refused the throne adopted a very kingly lifestyle. There was ***Polygamy:*** (8:30) Gideon adopted not only the Canaanite's idea of having a harem but apparently their moral standards as well,

because he had a concubine in Shechem. There was **Luxury:** He began his career as the " *least in Manasseh,*" (6:13) but he ended his life enjoying great luxury.
(Deut 17:17)

There was **Hypocrisy:** For do you see the name he gave his son ? (8:31) What proof of his backsliding, for Abimelech means " *My father is king.*" You see, Gideon professed to acknowledge God's kingship but he did not practice it. We talk so much, we act so little. My have you acknowledged Christ's Lordship by your lips ?
But what about your lifestyle ? Is your profession being matched by your practice ? 1.

2. His PRESENT contradicted His PAST:

Do you recall Gideon's first victory ? (6:27) His first victory was to destroy the altar of Baal ? Do you see his final tragedy ? (8:27) Gideon is leading them back to idolatry. What a solemn lesson for those who have been used mightily by God in the past ! You see, when we are old its possible to undo the very work that we did for God when we were young. When we were young we endeavoured to lead God's people out of strife, when we are old we could lead them back into strife. When we were young we were marked by zeal, when we are old we could marked by apathy. My the closing lesson from the life of Gideon is this !
Finish well ! (a)

(b) THE FRUIT OF DEFECTION IS SEEN IN

ISRAEL:

1. There was no REMEMBRANCE of God:

Look at (8:33-34) Now for the fifth time in the Book of Judges the cycle of sin begins again as the people turned away from God to the worship of Baal-berith, which means " *Baal of the covenant.*" Now its not that Israel forgot the identity of Jehovah, it simply means that what they knew of God exercised no control over them, held no grip on their loyalties. Sure, they could still answer catechism questions about the Lord, but that knowledge did not determine their commitment. You see, whatever factual, intellectual information about God they retained did not keep them from adopting Baal-berith as their god. In the latter months of 1947, sometime before the British mandate in Palestine expired, Jamil Mardam, the prime minister of Syria, joined other Arab leaders in planning a co-ordinated military attack on Israel as soon as the new Jewish state was born.

Ironically, all that winter Mardam's wife made her regular visits to Jerusalem, where she received treatment from her Jewish doctor. Apparently the benefit Mardam's wife received from a Jewish source had no impact on how he himself planned to deal with the Jews. That is he " *did not remember.*" Like Israel are you and I guilty of spiritual ingratitude ? Do we ever spontaneously praise the Lord and acknowledge what He has done in our lives ? Do we ever thank Him for the victories He has wrought ?

2. There was no RESPECT for Gideon:

Look at (8:35) Had they treasured Gideon and his work they would have dealt loyally with Gideon's family. Though the Bible forbids God's people to deify God's servants (Acts 10:25 Rev 19:10 22:8) it commands us to esteem them highly. (1 Thes 5:12)

(1 Tim 4:12) My are you grateful for the man or woman instrument that God used in bringing you to Christ ? (Phil 1:19) What about the saints who encourage you heavenward ? (Rom 16:3-4) What about those who minister the Word, those who " *have the rule over you.*" (Heb 13:7) Believers frequently show more skill using the critical knife than tendering thanks to parents, pastors, mentors, friends, to those who have laboured hard to instruct them in the Word of God. (1) But lets pass from Gideon to Abimelech and notice:

(2) AN INTERNAL RIVAL TO THE THRONE

Now we have noted already that most of Israel's enemies during the period of the Judges were external.

That is, they came from without. Moab, Midian, the Philistines ! But here the enemy does not come from *without* but rather from *within*. Abimelech was the renegade who lusted for power ! Now the principle that confronts us in this in this incident is that if we reject the true King, we will be ruled by a usurper. If the throne is not filled by God, it will be filled by Abimelech the bramble king. William Penn said on one occasion, " *If we are not willing to be governed by God*

we shall ruled by tyrants." That is the experience of Israel in (Judges Ch 9) but it is also the experience of a Christian who does not submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Do you recall his words ? (Rom 6:16) My if I do not walk in the Spirit I will walk in the flesh. If Jesus Christ does not rule my life my sinful nature will.

Now lets look at Abimelech, this rival to the throne and notice:

(a) THE AFFINITY HE CLAIMED:

Look at (9:1) Now if you look across to (8:31) you'll notice that Abimelech was the product of Gideon's years of backsliding. You see, he is a son of the flesh a carnal man with only carnal instincts. In fact, we can say of Abimelech that he is a carnal man with a carnal mother, with carnal relatives in carnal circumstances. " *Oh,*" you say " *if I backslide it will only affect me.*" Wait a minute. Do you not realise that you'll drag others with you ? For here is Abimelech, the result of Gideon's years of backsliding. And this carnal man says, " *My father is dead I would like to rule the people of God.*"

It's a tragedy is it not when a carnal man wants to be a leader among the people of God ? You see, carnal men often like to force themselves forward in the things of God to take a place of prominence, a place of leadership. Perhaps things have not been going according to their way of thinking in the church and they say, " *Now that man is no longer a elder I'll try and get in and turn things around.*" My is that not carnality ? Is that not the spirit of Diotrephes ?

Do you recall what John said of him ? " *But Diotrephes who loveth to have the preeminence.*" (3 Jn 9)

J. Vernon McGee said of him, " *There is generally one like him in every church who wants to control the church and the preacher, this man tried to be the first pope. He was Diotrephes the Dictator.*" (a)

(b) THE OPPORTUNITY HE GRASPED:

Look at (9:2) If there was a vacuum of leadership Abimelech was going to fill it at whatever cost. My is this not the basic lesson of (Judges Ch 9) ? If the Lord is not King, a usurper will arise in his place. If we are not practising the Lordship of Christ, there is a power vacuum in our lives which will be filled by a king, every bit as ruthless as Abimelech in his thirst for power. Do you what know this interval rival is ? Its the flesh. (Gal 5:16-18) Notice:

1. The CONFLICT Here:

(Gal 6:17) We could paraphrase it like this, " *For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the Holy Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to the flesh, godless human nature, for these are antagonistic to each other.*" Now by the " *flesh,*" Paul does not mean " *the body.*" The human body is not sinful, it is neutral. If the Holy Spirit controls the body, then we walk in the Spirit, but if the flesh controls the body, then we walk in the lusts or desires of the flesh. You see, ***the flesh stands for that part of man's nature wherein his natural desires have free rein.*** " *I know that in me,* "

writes Paul " *that is my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.*" (Rom 7:18) The flesh represents the sinful tendencies that become a part of your existence at birth. All of us were born " *in the flesh.*" Sometimes the Bible refers to this flesh nature as " *the old man.*" Our old man is our old nature. It is our old or natural nature. It is everything that physical birth that makes us. But then something wonderful happens. We receive Christ as our Saviour, and at that moment we receive a new spiritual nature.

The Bible refers to this nature as the new man. Now the unbeliever is a one natured man, the flesh, the believer is two-natured, the old sinful flesh and the new Spirit nature which came to him at conversion. Now did you notice that Paul says " *the old you,*" and the " *new you,*" don't get along at all. The word " *contrary,*" means " *to be in continual opposition.*" The flesh and the Spirit are mortal enemies. Civil War ? Yes ! Think about this. One Sunday morning your new nature wants to get up, go to church hear the Word and remember the Lord. But the old nature fights it. " *You are tired,*" an inner voice says.

" *You've had tough week, don't get up so early. Have a rest. You deserve a break.*" Have you heard that voice ? Have you ever known that struggle ? The old nature wants to look at a filthy programme and the new nature says, " *those scenes will pollute the mind.*" " *And these are contrary the one to the other.*" (Gal 5:17) 1.

2. The CONQUEST Here:

Look at (5:16) " *Walk in the Spirit,*" means " *keep in step with the Spirit.*" Not running ahead, or lagging behind.

This involves the Word, prayer, worship, praise and fellowship with the people of God. My the best way to deal with the "*lust of the flesh*," is simply to walk in the Spirit. Now if this language is too difficult to understand, let me say this. To walk in the Spirit is to live in conscious submission, obedience, and dependence upon the Lord Jesus. (Eph 5:18 Col 3:16)

Remember, if you are rightly related to one member of the Trinity, you cannot be wrongly related to another. To be in fellowship with the Lord Jesus is to be walking in the Spirit. Now remember the principle of (Judges Ch 9) If the Lord had been truly King, Abimelech could not have been king. My is it not the same in our lives ? The flesh cannot rule where Christ is Lord. That means, that the Christian life is not merely lived by beating down the flesh and trying as hard as I can to keep my old nature in its place. The crucial issue is whether I am keeping the Lord Jesus in His place. Some years Corrie ten Boom was in England where she had been participating in some meetings. At the end of those meetings three very proper clergymen of the church, all dressed in their clerical collars and dark grey suits and looking very official, took her to the train. Corrie got on, and they stood on the platform to watch her go.

Just as the train, began to pull out, Corrie leaned out the window and shouted a last message to them and she shouted so loudly so everyone could hear, "*Don't wrestle, just nestle.*" All the men went pink, but they never forgot the message. "*Don't wrestle, just nestle.*" My is this not the way of victory ? Oh, discipline is

necessary, but its not enough we must nestle close to the Lord and keep Him in His rightful place. (a) (b)

(c) THE STRATEGY HE ADOPTED:

I mean Abimelech wanted to be King so what does he do ? Well, look at (9:4-5) Abimelech does a bit of lobbying and he gathers around him a carnal crowd who will back him up in his carnal ideas ! You see, wherever there is a carnal man who wants to take over leadership, he will always seek the backing of a carnal crowd. Sometimes as you move around the churches someone will come to you and say, "*Well if you go around this church you'll discover there are a lot of folk who agree with what I say.*" Men who are vieing for leadership will always seek the support of a carnal crowd. Abimelech is not only lobbying, he is sowing seeds of dissatisfaction. (9:2) My have you not seen this story lived out before your very eyes ? Someone rises within the church to challenge the leadership, and before long they've gathered round them a little splinter group. Stories of dissatisfaction with what the elders are doing begin to circulate, people lend their ears and before long there is bitterness, hatred, and murder. Do you recall what the Book of Proverbs says ? "*These six things doth the Lord hate he that soweth discord among brethren.*" (Prov 6:19) Are you beginning to see Abimelech for what he was ? Look at:

(d) THE MASTERY HE EFFECTED:

Look at (9:6) Who raised up Othniel to deliver Israel ?
God ! (3:9) Who raised up Ehud against Moab ? God !
(3:15) Who raised up Gideon to fight the Midianites ?
God ! (6:11) But do you notice the contrast here ? For here
the people gather together and make Abimelech king.
My is that what we do in the local church ? Who
makes leaders ? Who makes elders ? God ! Do you
recall Pauls words in (Acts 20:28)

*" Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock
over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,
to feed the church of God which He hath purchased
with His own blood."* Who makes
overseers ? The Holy Spirit ! How are we to recognise them
in the local church ? Well, if a man desires the office of
a bishop he must have certain qualities that Paul
enunciates in (1 Timothy Ch 3) moreover he must
marked by love for the Shepherd and love for the
sheep.

There's something else I want you to see here, look at:

(e) THE VANITY HE REVEALED:

Where do you see Abimelech's vanity ? In the parable of
Jotham. For some reason the tree's decided to appoint a
king. So they approached the olive tree, a valuable and
prized tree, and got a flat " **No.**" (9:9) So the
nominating committee went to the fig tree and got a
very similar reply. Then they turned to the grape and
there was the same response. Now there are several
things we should notice about these trees. They
recognised that they already had a king God. What
good was a king of the trees ? They did not want to

rule, they simply wanted to function as God intended
them to function. Then again, they were all fruitbearing
trees. But not the bramble or thorn bush. This tree was
useless because it bore no fruit. This tree was
dangerous because in the heat of summer it could catch
on fire and set the countryside ablaze. Imagine having
a bramble king but that's what Israel chose when they
crowned Abimelech king.

My do you see what carnal men and flesh are like
now ? *The flesh is a bramble.* If it takes control of my life, it
will not produce fruit, but rather the ugly, destructive
works of the flesh. Paul catalogues them in
(Galatians 5:19-21) and we need to reflect soberly on that
list. In radical contrast stands the fruit of the Spirit, the
product of His growth in my life. You see, the principle
of control is clear. My life will show the results of who
controls it. The flesh will produce destructive bramble
works, but the Spirit will produce within me a
Christlike character. (1) (2)

(3) A SENSATIONAL RESPONSE FROM THE THRONE

Isn't it wonderful to know that our God has always the final
say ? Look at (9:22-23) Seventy sons of Gideon lay
dead, a despot was on the throne. The whole land was
given over to idolatry. You say, " *the thing is hopeless,*"
it is until you read these words " *then God.*"

What did God do ? God sent:

(a) DISCORD:

Look at (9:23, 41) Had Abimelech not come with great promises ? My ... they never materialised and now the people of Shechem try to break away from him ! Have you ever seen Christians turn away from the Lordship of Christ and embrace a false promise of liberty ? For a while it seems to be very good. There is the enjoyment of the pleasure of sin, for a short time. After all Abimelech reigned for three years before his reign turned to ashes in their mouths. Oh, for a while this false liberty seems so good, but then it turns sour.

Paul says, "*Be not deceived God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*" (Gal 6:7) Discord between Abimelech and his supporters ! Do you know something ? God can handle His own church. And when then there are some who would disturb the peace and bring in strife, God can come in and separate the leaders from their supporters. My ... have you never seen this happening ? Leaders and their cronies falling out among themselves ! (a)

(b) DEFIANCE:

Look at (9:26-29) So now there is rebellion by a carnal man against a carnal man who slew the spiritual men. Sometimes we can agitated in the local church. We say, "*there's a man who's pushed himself to the fore and everything is going wrong and he's controlling the church and we feel like rising up and saying, enough is enough, this man will have to go.*" Yes ! But don't you dare remove him. (Saul) Tell the Lord about it and you may be surprised how quickly his seat will be vacant. Is this not what happened to Abimelech ? (a)

(b) and now:

(c) DESTRUCTION:

For did not Jotham say, "*Let fire come out of the bramble.*" (9:15) And fire did, and the result was Gaal was defeated, Shechem was destroyed (9:42-45) and the nobles were roasted alive. (9:46-49) (a) (b) (c) and:

(d) DEATH:

Look at (9:53-57) My Abimelech reaped what he had sown !

The Renegade who Lusted for Power ! This story confronts us with this great principle. If the throne is not filled by God the King it will be filled by an Abimelech a bramble king. My ... Judges (Ch 9) poses the great question: *Is there a power vacuum in your life ?* If the Lord Jesus is not Lord then the bramble king of the flesh will seize control. If you are not walking in the Spirit, you are walking in the flesh. There are no other alternatives. *Which is true of you ?*