

8. Whose kingdom come?

1/19/2006

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3 in one morning. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'"

Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

We laugh at that story, because we all would rather have our own ways over God's way if we can get away with it. Because all of us are selfish and ambitious for our own self-interest even though we look pious outside.

I can comfortably say that there is almost heaven and hell difference between selfishness and selflessness. Here are the definition for 'Selfishness' and 'Selflessness':

Selfishness: Concerned only with oneself

Selflessness: Having, exhibiting, or motivated by no concern for oneself

A couple of good examples of selfishness we can find from the Bible are Absalom and Abimelech. However, we find the best example of selflessness from our Lord Jesus Christ who gave up His life for all of us.

Absalom and Abimelech was just the opposite of Jesus. They both had such a passionate desire to be king that they allowed nothing to stand in their ways, not even the lives of hundreds of innocent people. This is the longest chapter in the Book of Judges and one of the most depressing one.

A. ABIMELECH'S CONSPIRACY

Judges 9:1-6 Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 2 "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I am your own flesh and bone." 3 And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." 4 So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. 5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. 6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.

As we have learned last week, Abimelech was the son of Gideon by a slave woman who lived with her father's family in Shechem. His name means "my father is a king."

In his selfish ambitious mind, he decided that he would be a king over Israel at any cost.

Ambition itself isn't an evil thing, as long as it is mixed with genuine humility and is controlled by the will of God. If it's God's wind that lifts us and we're soaring on

wings that He's given us, then we can fly as high as He takes us. But if we manufacture both the wind and the wings, we're heading for a terrible crash and burn.

As a matter of fact, selfish ambition destroys.

Lucifer said:

Isaiah 14:13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north

King Nebuchadnezzar said:

Daniel 4:28-33 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" 31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." 33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Abimelech killed his half-brothers on his father's side with the support of the half-brothers on his mother's side.

James 4:1-2 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

B. THE PARABLE BY JOTHAM

Judges 9:7-21 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, That God may listen to you! 8 "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' 9 But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, With which they honor God and men, And go to sway over trees?' 10 "Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us!' 11 But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, And go to sway over trees?' 12 "Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us!' 13 But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers both God and men, And go to sway over trees?' 14 "Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us!' 15 And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, Then come and take shelter in my shade; But if not, let fire come out of the bramble And devour the cedars of Lebanon!' 16 "Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves-- 17 for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; 18 but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant,

king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother-- 19 if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. 20 But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" 21 And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

This is the first parable recorded in Scripture. Many people have the idea that Jesus invented parables and that they are found only in the four Gospels, but neither is the case. For examples, Nathan's "Parable of the Ewe Lamb" to king David, the parable by the woman of Tekoa from general Joab to king David and many more. We will learn more about parables on this coming Sunday morning.

Jotham pictured the trees looking for a king. They approached the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine. But all of them refused to accept the position of king. All that remained was the bramble, a thornbush that was a useless nuisance in the land, good only for fuel for the fire. Often in the summer, fires would break out in the bramble bushes and these fires would spread and threaten the safety of the trees.

It's a dangerous thing for us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We all need to discover the gifts God has given us and then use them in the place where He puts us. Each member in the body of Christ is important, and we all need to minister to one another. Since there's no competition in the work of the Lord, there's no need for us to promote ourselves over others. The important thing is that only God receives the glory.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

C. PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE WICKED COALITION

Judges 9:22-29 After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, 23 God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 24 that the crime done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers. 25 And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech. 26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. 27 So they went out into the fields, and gathered grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech. 28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? 29 If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"

The Lord created a breach between the king and his followers, so much so that the Shechemites started to work against the king. Abimelech is going to find out the fact that God's millstone grinds slowly, but it grinds exceedingly fine.

Gaal's approach in v28 is very effective. He reminded the people of Shechem that Abimelech is a half Shechem and a half Jew instead of a complete Shechem person like him. The very platform Abimelech used to get the support from Shechem people became the eye of a storm against him.

Judges 9:30-49 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. 31 And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. 32 Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. 33 And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity." 34 So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from lying in wait. 36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!" But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men." 37 So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree." 38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed is your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now." 39 So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the very entrance of the gate. 41 Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem. 42 And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. 43 So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. 44 Then Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the other two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and killed them. 45 So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who were in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt. 46 Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard that, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. 47 And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid it on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done." 49 So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put them against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

This shows the problem of following a man who comes to power through violence. It is only a matter of time until he turns the same violence against that the followers.

Matthew 26:52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

The people of Shechem thought that their tower would protect them from Abimelech's attack. There is a completely secure tower anyone can find if they want. It is the name of the Lord.

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.

As Jotham predicted, the fire did "come out of the bramble which is Abimelech, and devour the cedars of Lebanon". The phrase "cedars of Lebanon" represents the leading citizens of the city, who had supported Abimelech's rule.

E. ABIMELECH GOT SO STONED

Judges 9:50-57 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. 51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women--all the people of the city--fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. 52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" So his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place. 56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. 57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

After his brutal victory at the tower of Shechem, Abimelech probably thought he was an expert at "tower attack." He went to Thebez and attacked the city and the tower there with his over-inflated confidence.

However, he made a fatal mistake of getting too close to the tower, and a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and fatally injured him. I guess he really got stoned.

The bottom line is that Abimelech ignore another fact we all should remember. It is not ourselves who can make our own future, but God.

Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.

Our Lord Jesus gave us a great example of His selflessness at the Garden of Gethsemane. He was willing to take His Father's will over His own, even though He knew what kind of sufferings he had to go through.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Ambition itself isn't an evil thing, as long as it is mixed with genuine humility and is controlled by the will of God.

If it's God's wind that lifts us and we're soaring on wings that He's given us, then we can fly as high as He takes us. But if we manufacture both the wind and the wings, we're heading for a terrible fall.

2) It's a dangerous thing for us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

Each member in the body of Christ is important, and we all need to minister to one another. Since there's no competition in the work of the Lord, there's no need for us

to promote ourselves over others. The important thing is that only God receives the glory.