

Judges 10:6-16

Lent 4; March 27 & 28, 2022

How many of you like roundabouts? How many of you don't like roundabouts? Some of the cons of roundabouts are drivers tend to be uncertain as to when they are to yield or when they go. Sometimes, it can seem like there are too many entry points in the roundabout. Some might think that there are too many vehicles to watch from different directions. Sometimes, drivers enter the roundabouts too fast and then have troubles with the curves.

Yet, roundabouts can have some very big pros. They save time because drivers don't have to stop. It saves gas because engines don't have to keep running as you are waiting for a green light. It saves electricity because there are no traffic lights or controllers to run. It reduces maintenance because there are no lights to maintain. It reduces the number of severe crashes significantly. There are fewer crashes like T-bone type in roundabouts. In other words, they save lives.

Do you ever feel like life is like a roundabout? We sin. Things get difficult. We plead for mercy. God is merciful and things get better. We fall back into the same sin. Things become more difficult. We plead for mercy. God is merciful and things get better. And so it goes. As we look at these words of our text, let us see how God calls us to break that cycle of sin and remain with him through all things.

The people of ancient Israel were supposed to stay close to their God. He had made a special covenant with them. This covenant is sometimes described in Scripture like a marriage. God calls himself the husband of Israel, his bride. They were to serve him and worship him only. He had helped them escape the slavery of Egypt and had been at their side as they marched into the land of Canaan. He would bless them and be with them as they served him in the land and prospered. They didn't keep that command of God and did the exact opposite of what God had commanded them.

“Again, the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines.” There are seven different gods listed in that verse. If you look at where these nations were on a map, they completely surround the children of Israel. Instead of destroying these unbelievers and their gods, they incorporated all of them into their worship. It wasn't that they had just done this once. The book of Judges shows the children of Israel going through 7 cycles of sinning and forsaking God and coming back to him again. In our text, they are in the 6th cycle of seven.

Instead of following God's commands, they **“did evil in the eyes of the Lord.”** As a nation, they once again rejected God. They weren't just disobedient, but God says they were **evil**. So, what was God's response? **“But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you.”** They wanted to leave, so God let them. That's a scary thought, isn't it? God desires his people to have a relationship with him. But when his people continually wander it is as if God says, *“You don't want to be my people, then go!”* If you have ever been to the Grand Canyon, there are many places where you can get too close to the edge without anyone stopping you. Sure, there will be warning signs saying *“danger.”* But there's not a ranger there to stop every foolish step in the park. This is the same thing we read about earlier in Luke's gospel account. The son basically said to his father, *“I don't want anything to do with you, I'm leaving.”* One of the worst things God can say to us when we sin is *“Well, if that is your choice, I'm gone.”*

As a consequence of their sin, God removed his protecting hand from them. **“And because the Israelites forsook the Lord and no longer served him, he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, who that year shattered and crushed them.”** When it says that God “became angry with them,” it literally says that his nostrils burned. I think of the old cartoon characters that had smoke coming out of their nose and ears when they were angry. God became so angry at their sin, he *“sold”* them off. He no longer was going to protect them. He gave them into the hands of someone else to do as they pleased.

With that protective hand of God removed, they suffered judgment. **“For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress.”** They suffered from all sides. It wasn't just for even a few weeks, for a year, but 18 years. Under these attacks they were **“shattered and crushed.”** Have you ever dropped a dish in the kitchen? When it hits the floor, it just shatters. You seem to find little pieces for

days and weeks ahead. It's that kind of destruction that God brought on the children of Israel. You look at these Israelites and think: *"why didn't they get out of the roundabout?"* Instead, they stay in this cycle of sin. You get the feeling that the children of Israel were acting like a child who is told that he needs to say that he is sorry. He does, but he doesn't really mean it. He knows the right words to say, but his heart isn't in it. **"You have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you."**

You look at those words and you say, why would God say that? One simple reason – he's serious about sin. Sin brings death – eternal death. Sometimes sinners play games with sin with God. He says that he is not going to play a game. He wanted to see the children of Israel get serious about sin as well. He wants that cycle of sin broken. Finally, they listen. **"We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now."**

Then God speaks one of those incredible and beautiful verses in the Bible. **"And he could bear Israel's misery no longer."** God could no longer bear the misery of our sin. He could no longer bear the thought of us being condemned for eternity. He could no longer bear being apart from his chosen people. Instead, he once again poured his Grace on God's people. God cannot bear being stuck in that cycle of sin, that roundabout of sin. Instead, he wants to pour his grace on us again and again. So, what does God do? He sends Jesus.

God poured out his deliberate, justified anger over sin on Jesus. God then poured out his prodigal, reckless love on us. God's patience over sin had run out. God took out his impatience on his Son, instead of on us. When we feel like we are stuck in that cycle of sin, may God also help us to see the roundabout of his grace. That's the kind of love and mercy the Lord has for us. I'm not sure that we all never agree on roundabouts, but can rejoice in the cycle of Grace that God keeps pouring on us every day. May God grant it. Amen.