**A Parable of the Trees**

Judges 9:1-57

Key Verse: Judges 9:56,57

In chapter 8, we saw Gideon and the Three Hundred won one of the greatest victories over the Midianite in Israel’s history. It could be done only by God Almighty. But Israel wanted to make Gideon their king. Then Gideon declared, 'I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.' (8:23) However, in the 40 years of peace, Gideon lived like a king. He had seventy sons from many wives and concubines, which set a bad example that contrasted with his achievements. (8:27) After Gideon's death, Israel again turned to idol worship, forgetting God who saved them(8:33-35).

Chapter 9 talks about Abimelech, Gideon’s son, who made himself the king of Israel in a wicked way by the help of Shechem, a wicked people. Jotham delivers them a prophetic message of curse using the parable of the trees. Indeed, God repaid their wickedness, just as Jotham had said in his parable. In this lesson, we want to know the living God who judges the wickedness of the world. We also want to learn how to deal with the wickedness and what attitude to have.

**Part I. Jotham’s Parable(1-24)**

Look at verse 1. Who is Abimelech? He was one of Gideon’s sons, and his mother was Gideon’s concubine, a woman of Shechem. Gideon named him "Abimelech," ironically meaning "my father is king." Gideon refused to be king but put his desire to be king into his son's name.

9:2-6 explains how he became king. He went to the city of Shechem and stirred up the people, his mother's relatives and clan. He asked all the citizens of Shechem if they would rather have the 70 sons of Gideon rule over them or just Abimelech who is their flesh and blood. Abimelech's words provoked blood ties and regionalism. The people of Shechem expected some benefit if they supported Abimelech. So, they organized a support camp and provided Abimelech with 70 shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith. With this money, Abimelech hired reckless troublemakers(gangsters) and went to Ophrah and killed all 70 of his brothers except for the youngest named Jotham who hid himself during the massacre. In verse 6, the people of Shechem made Abimelech their king.

Look at verse 7. Jotham, the only survivor, climbed up to the mount Gerizim, and began shouting to the people of Shechem on the top of the Mountain. **"Listen to me, citizens of Shechem."** He cried aloud to the citizens of Shechem a parable of the trees. One day, the trees went out to find their king, the King of the Trees. There were three candidates: Olive tree, Fig tree, and Vine. The trees offered the kingship to the olive tree, saying, "Be our king." However, the olive tree firmly declined, saying **"Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees?"** Olive oil was useful in cooking, lamps, and medicine. Also, it was used for anointing a priest or a king. The olive tree was grateful and satisfied for bearing much olive fruit and glorifying God and men and did not want to become a king. So the trees went to the fig tree and asked him to be their king. However, the fig tree also refused in saying, **'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?'** The fig tree was the most popular fruit tree among the Israelites. But since the people needed the fruit, the fig tree wanted to stay in its original position and refused to become king. The trees went to the vine and earnestly begged, "Come and be our king." But the vine refused, saying **'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?'** The fruit of the vine was used to make wine, used as an offering to God, a tithe, wages for workers, and a remedy for the stomach.

Now, the trees were in great distress. Since all the candidates declined, finally they went to the thornbush and asked him, "Come and be our king." But the thornbush immediately accepted the offer and gave them an acceptance speech. **'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!'** He was intimidating the trees from the beginning.

What is the difference between the three trees and the thornbush? In common, the three trees were humble in their position, and they were all interested in pleasing and glorifying God and people. However, the thornbush was selfish, arrogant, self-centered with no God in his heart. The three trees provided cool shade to people. However, the thornbush only protected himself with his thorns. The three trees each produced useful oil, delicious fruit, and choice wine to satisfy people and God. They were faithful to God’s given task. However, the thornbush only made people nervous with its sharp thorns and wanted to rule over others.

The trees in the parable refer to the citizens of Shechem who made Abimelech king according to their desire. The olive tree, fig tree, and vine refer to Gideon's other sons who refused the throne and humbly did their duties in the position, and the thornbush refers to Abimelech who became a king for himself without qualification and appointment by God.

Through the parable of the trees, we learn the three trees’ humbleness, gratefulness, and faithfulness to God. When we are faithful grateful to fulfilling God’s will with God’s given talents and helping people for their salvation, God give us the greatest satisfaction and joy from heaven. But the more we try to satisfy our own desires and selfishness, the more miserable we become. We cannot help but become like thornbush with thorns. Each of us has God’s good purpose for which God created us. God gave each one his talent. We are created by God to use the talents, time, and passions to devote ourselves to doing good works for God and people. **Ephesians 2:10 says, For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** In GTA SBC, we learned that God has chosen us to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We no longer belong to the world, but to God. However, how easy it is to be selfish and self-centered like thornbush? How easy it is to be tempted by practical gain by compromising with the wickedness like the people of shechem? I pray that we may not be selfish or arrogant before God, but humbly and gratefully serve God and God’s people. I pray that we may not seek visible and tangible gain of wickedness but seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness according to a good conscience before God. I pray that we may repent of Abimelech’s and the Shechemites elements within us.

In fact, the true king of the trees is God, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the king of kings and Lord of lords, but he humbly came into this world and emptied himself and became a servant to save the sinners. Jesus became like an olive tree, washed our sins, and healed all our wounds with his own blood. Jesus became like a fig tree, making our lives joyful in his abundant blessing. Jesus became like a vine and made our lives anew with the new wine of the Holy Spirit. **Mark 10:45 says, 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** Jesus served us with all he had and with all he could do and glorified God by fulfilling His will. He was deserted and forsaken, died and buried. However, God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. **(Philippians 2:9-11). 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** Jesus is the king that we should imitate on. I pray that we may learn about Jesus, our King and Lord. We may deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus.

I thought I was a humble person. I was not like Abimelech. So I thought this passage is not speaking to me. But M.Hannah told me you are arrogant. My children sometimes say the same thing. Yes, I seems to say the right things, but I arrogantly do not teach myself. Yes, I tried to become king over my family members and many times harshly acted to them. Lord, I may accept Jesus as my king and the king of my house.

**Part II. God repays the wickedness(22-57)**

Now, God repays the wickedness of Abimelech and the people of Shechem. **Let’s read verses 22-24 together.** The alliance between Abimelech and the Shechemites lasted only for three years, because God sent an evil spirit to cause the Shechemites to betray Abimelech. **In verse 26**, we see that Gaal, son of Ebed, led the betrayal. He held a banquet in the Baal temple, gathered Shechem's leaders, and shouted, "Who is Abimelech…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!’” Just as Abimelech had previously seized power through blood ties and regionalism, Gaal the leader of the rebellion is using the same method this time. This is how the battle finally broke out between Gaal's Shechemites and Abimelech's soldiers.

In verse 41, we see that Gaal was eventually banished by Abimelech. Abimelech spent the whole day killing the people of Shechem, destroying the city. Abimelech thoroughly punished and cursed the people of Shechem who betrayed him. He fully displayed his nature as the thornbush.

**Look at verse 47.** Abimelech's slaughter continued. Someone told him that the Shechemites were hiding in the tower of Shechem. Then Abimelech cut down trees, and set fire to the tower. All the Shechemites hiding in the tower were burned to death. About a thousand men and women died at that time (49). However, Abimelech was not satisfied. Someone told him that the Shechemites were hiding in the tower of Thebez. Then he went there and tried to kill them all. When an evil spirit possessed him, he continued to kill like an animal. However, his wickedness did not last long. A woman dropped an upper millstone from the wall on Abimelech, and it fell directly on his head, fracturing his skull. Thus, the murderous rampage of Abimelech ended.

How does the author conclude this incident with his final comment? **Let’s read verses 56 and 57 together.** 56 Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers. 57 God also made the men of Shechem pay for all their wickedness. The curse of Jotham son of Jerub-Baal came on them. God repaid Abimelech for the wickedness he had done to his father's house by killing his 70 brothers. He also punished the people of Shechem for their wickedness by making him king. Jotham’s prophecy came true without missing any words.

First, we reap what we sow. **Galatians 6:7 7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.** We see Gideon's desire to become king was planted in Abimelech. And it grew up to be like a thornbush and brought such terrible results. We should not sow thorny seeds, but sow seeds like olive trees, fig-trees, and vines. The good seed is the word of God. **2 Tim 3:16-17 16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.** I pray that we may diligently plant God’s words in our heart and let them grow in prayers until we harvest the fruit of righteousness.

Secondly, God repays all the wickedness. Why doesn’t God remove the wickedness of the world? Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Today’s passage answers these questions. God is the living God and he is the righteous Judge, he will surely repay righteousness with salvation and wickedness with punishment. Therefore, I pray that we may not follow the wickedness of the world, but seek God’s righteousness.

**In conclusion**, today’s passage gives us a life lesson. Through the parable of the trees, we learn what kind of tree we should be. We should become the trees that bring glory to God and salvation to people by bearing righteous fruit, not wicked fruit. To do this, we must deeply receive God’s word and live according to it. I pray that we may imitate on Jesus our best example.