

Flawed Heroes Part 4

Abimelech: The Betrayer

Judges 9

Memory Verses: Genesis 50:20

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

In the book of Judges, God shows us that he doesn't want to use perfect people. Perhaps perfect people can't get across his point... or display his glory as well as the imperfect. So, he uses guys like Ehud and Gideon. A disabled outcast and a whining coward. He uses Deborah, a second class citizen, to bring about the retribution of God and bring revival to the land.

Why? Because it's simple... he wants you to recognize that if he can use them... he can use you. In fact he desperately wants to use you, with all of your flaws and failures... because in your weakness he shows himself strong, and in your failures he shows himself faithful! These people are flawed heroes... and that means you can be a hero too!

God can most definitely use you if he can use a guy like Abimelech! Abimelech is flawed. Much more so than even Ehud, Gideon, or Deborah combined. Cause, Abimelech isn't just flawed, he is simply evil! And so the question we've been wrestling with this series, "can God use flawed people," gets ratcheted up to a whole other level right? It's not just "can God use flawed people;" it's "can God use evil people?" And not only, "can God use evil people;" but "can God use evil people to essentially be heroes... for at least a short time?"

If God can use evil people to be heroes then what does that say about God? Does that mean that God is complicit in their evil? Does that mean that God is okay with their sin? It makes me think about Pharaoh in the days of Moses, who's heart was hardened, and he would not let God's people go. The Bible tells us in **Exodus 9:12** that it was the LORD who hardened Pharaoh's heart. It's clear that what Pharaoh did was evil... but it was a part of God's plan. It makes me think that no matter what, whether evil or good, God is in control and will use either evil or good in the hearts of men to accomplish his will! It makes me think of Joseph. After all his brothers did to him, after what Potiphar's wife did to him, after the baker forgot about him and left him to rot in jail... in **Genesis 50:20** he says one of the most profound statements in the entire Bible; "what you meant for evil, God meant for good!" Here's the thing... God specializes at taking evil men and evil plots and using them for his glory!

The major problem with Abimelech is not that he had extremely evil intentions, evil intentions was merely the means to an end. Abimelech's chief issue was selfish ambition. He wanted to rule. Unlike

Ehud, Deborah, or Gideon, who were all chosen for their tasks, Abimelech became a ruler through his own means... and those means were incredible wicked. This morning it is imperative that we recognize that though God will work through our sin for the good of his glory and his plan... but we are also responsible for our selfish ambition and the collateral damage it causes.

So this morning let's look at the story of Abimelech, a man who was not a hero in the traditional sense, who was an evil ambitious man, and how his ambition eventually ruined him. Let's start by looking at **Judges 9:1-6** and see this morning that... **one of the greatest miracles is the fact that God takes our selfish ambition and sinful actions and uses them to achieve his sovereign plan.** This morning let's see three aspects of Abimelech's story that God wants to use to change our perspective on our sinful ambition and his sovereign plan!

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we are going to see here is that... **Selfish Ambition Almost Always Means Destroying Others.** In **9:1-6** Abimelech conspires with his mother to kill 70 of his brothers and take over as leader of Israel. He makes an alliance with the pagan city state of Shechem and then with their approval kills all 70 of his brothers by beheading them all on one stone. Can you imagine what kind of evil must be in one's heart to behead 70 of your brothers. Brothers who you grew up with, played with, and at one point loved. And in doing so he unashamedly betrays the legacy of his father Gideon. Abimelech is clearly willing to do whatever it takes to be the ruler. Selfish ambition is willing to do whatever it takes... even very evil things. Abimelech thinks he's doing a great thing by building his kingdom but **Habakkuk 2:12** warns us that; "woe to him who builds a city through crime." The means does not justify the end!

And then we see that Abimelech becomes king? Now many theologians do not consider this a true kingship and thus they do not recognize Abimelech as the first king of Israel. He is merely taking the place of Gideon as judge. Regardless, Abimelech wants kingship even though Gideon in **Judges 8:23** made it clear that no one in his family would ever be king. And get this; by aligning Israel with Shechem he basically allows Shechem to overcome Israel. In the sin cycle of Judges we recognize that when the people sin God brings an oppressor. Here Abimelech brings a self imposed oppression on the people of Israel. Once again, he'll do whatever it takes to be in power. He doesn't care about Israel or Israel's God... he only cares about himself. And this chaos shouldn't surprise us. **James 3:13,16** tells us that selfish ambition leads to disorder and every evil practice. As we know... **selfish ambition always leads to sinful action.**

What about you? Are you putting God's glory or your glory first? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to get what you want? Do you struggle with selfish ambition? Repent and turn back to the God who takes evil and

uses it for good! **One of the greatest miracles is the fact that God takes our selfish ambition and sinful actions and uses them to achieve his sovereign plan.**

Secondly, we see that... **Selfish Ambition Almost Always Means You're Own Destruction**. We see this through Abimelech's downfall in **9:7-41, 50-56**. First we see that one of Abimelech's brothers, Jotham, escapes and prophesies against Abimelech and Shechem. He basically tells a parable about all the trees of the woods declining to rule except the bramble wood representing Abimelech. He ends his speech by proclaiming that if what you're doing is evil then it will all burn you to death like a bramble wood fire in the end.

Of course, if you are familiar with these types of stories in the Bible, Jotham's prophecy comes true in only 3 short years. Look at **vs22-25**. Here, after three years of oppression, God sends an evil spirit to turn Shechem against Abimelech & Israel. Notice that God sends an evil spirit! My assumption is that this a demon. We are talking about God's sovereignty over evil and here we see that God actually will use evil demons to do his bidding. His bidding is the deliverance of his people from the rule of Shechem. God is in control of evil and in control of delivering his people.

Abimelech's ambition eventually leads to the downfall of his leadership. And so... now would be a good time to understand God's opinion on ambition. Here's a few biblical principles on selfish ambition. "The first will be last and the last will be first." Leaders serve and servants lead. "I will boast in nothing except the cross and Christ crucified." **Luke 9:25** - what does it profit a man who loses himself. Selfish Ambition says be first no matter what. Like **Ricky Bobby** – "if you aint first you're last". The two are like oil and water. One says to be first be last and the other says if you ain't first your last. The worlds idea of ambition and God's idea of ambition couldn't be further than the other.

And where does worldly selfish ambition lead to? Look with me at **vs50-56**. All dictators must fight to keep their power and as soon as you stop fighting to keep it you will lose it! Abimelech's ambition led to his own destruction in a couple of ways. First, Abimelech thought he was indestructible, unbeatable. He'd already won one battle where he had to overcome a tower... why would this be any different. Secondly, he was defeated by a second class woman, someone who he would never have considered a threat. Again it is so true, pride comes before destruction. In the end Abimelech is humiliated. Again, no surprise. **Matthew 23:12** tells us that whoever exalts himself will be humbled. Selfish ambition always ends in self destruction. Maybe... if you are first... you're last. **When you are willing to do anything to win, you will always lose. One of the greatest miracles is the fact that God takes our selfish ambition**

and sinful actions and uses them to achieve his sovereign plan.

Lastly, we see that **No Selfish Ambition Is More Ambitious Than God's Sovereign Plan**. Abimelech was an evil ambitious man who got his in the end. He was also the architect of his own people's 3 year oppression by a foreign power in Shechem... And, yet God used him to overthrow Shechem and Israel's oppressors! Look at **9:45-49**. How does Abimelech overcome Shechem? Abimelech takes out Shechem with.... nothing less than bramble wood fire fulfilling Jotham's prophecy.

So why does God use this evil man? Because God is always in control and his plan is always to free his people! No other Judge illustrates our main theme more than Abimelech... **God uses flawed people to free people**. God even uses evil people. Why? Because God is sovereign over evil. **Psalm 103:19** tells us that the Lord has established and rules over all. **Proverbs 19:21** reminds us that man has plans but the lord will stand. And of course **Romans 8:28** gives us the promise that God works all things together for the good of his people and his will. God takes evil people and evil intentions and somehow supernaturally uses it to accomplish his will. And so again we look at the words of Joseph in **Genesis 50:20** what you meant it for evil God meant it for good. Abimelech, what you meant for evil... God meant for good! It truly is amazing... **One of the greatest miracles is the fact that God takes our selfish ambition and sinful actions and uses them to achieve his sovereign plan.**

Application

So some of us may ask... is all ambition bad? No. We all have ambitions but as Christians our ambitions need to be for God's glory and his kingdom more than it's about our promotion. When our ambitions trump God's will for his glory and our lives then we will no doubt destroy others and ourselves. And yet, still in our selfish ambition and sinful actions God will work our evil for good!

And so let's take a look at ourselves today. What about you? How have you been selfishly ambitious? How have you tried to destroy or actually destroyed others in your selfish pursuits? How have you seen your life fall apart due to your selfish ambition? Have you repented? Pray that God would take what you meant for evil and use it for good! **One of the greatest miracles is the fact that God takes our selfish ambition and sinful actions and uses them to achieve his sovereign plan**

Conclusion

As Paul is in prison, some people inform him that some other people are preaching in such a way that it could look like an attack on Paul. And Paul says this in **Philippians 1:15-18**. Did you catch that? Whether people preach Christ from a noble position or a position of selfish ambition, if Christ

is still preached, it's good! Meaning.... God can use evil ambitious people to even share the Gospel! The point is simple. Selfish Ambition is evil, and sinful actions are evil... but never underestimate God's ability to take what we mean for evil and turn it into something good for his glory and for our good! **One of the greatest miracles is the fact that God takes our selfish ambition and sinful actions and uses them to achieve his sovereign plan**