

April 2 — Man of Valor

READ

Judges 7:1-9:21

Judges 7:7,16,20-22, *“The Lord told Gideon, ‘With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home.’ ... He divided the 300 men into three groups and gave each man a ram’s horn and a clay jar with a torch in it. ... Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands, and they all shouted, ‘A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!’ Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran to escape. When the 300 Israelites blew their rams’ horns, the Lord caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords.”*

THINK

Israel was in a tight spot! They were in the midst of a terrible famine, and the food they did have was subject to Midianite raiders. They literally had to raise livestock and prepare food in hiding.

Gideon was laying low in a winepress threshing wheat when the angel of the Lord appeared and called him a “Great man of valor.” What?! He wasn’t a decorated soldier or man who secured amazing victories for Israel. He was ordinary, just like us. Yet God wanted to use him in a mighty way — to defeat the nation’s biggest threat, the Midianite army of approximately 135,000 soldiers.

At first, Gideon couldn't wrap his head around what he was being asked to do. He gave excuses and, in doubt, asked God for two signs to prove that he was really the man for the job. God obliged. So, Gideon gathered 32,000 men to aid him in this ever so daunting task. But God said, “You still have too many men. Tell those who fear battle to go home.” Gulp! Gideon obeyed and was left with 10,000 soldiers. God said, “You still have too many men. The world needs to see that this victory belongs to Me.” Then God orchestrated a plan to winnow out the ones He’d choose to go forth in battle. The result — only 300 men remained! But, as promised, this victory did belong to the Lord! Armed with only torches in glass jars and ram’s horns, they overcame the massive Midianite army because God was in the fight.

That’s what’s so crucial for us to remember. No matter what we’re facing, God fights for us when we are willing to abide in Him and trust that He is in control. We, too, are mighty people of valor when we believe that there’s nothing He can’t overcome as we willingly do what He’s called us to do!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I completely trust in Your ability to overcome the odds. Guide me to be a person of valor who wholeheartedly believes in Your victory no matter what I face. Amen.

April 3 — Rebellion Never Ends Well

READ

Judges 9:22-11:28

Judges 9:22-24, *“After Abimelech had ruled over Israel for three years, God sent a spirit that stirred up trouble between Abimelech and the leading citizens of Shechem, and they revolted. God was punishing Abimelech for murdering Gideon’s seventy sons, and the citizens of Shechem for supporting him in this treachery of murdering his brothers.”*

THINK

When characters are introduced in a story, we often don’t have insight into their background right away. In the case of Abimelech, we can surmise that his family relationships were obviously strained. After killing his brothers to secure his role as the ruler of Shechem, he probably thought his future was pretty set. However, we read that the very people who supported him in the revolt were the same who would revolt against him. After many years of peace, this would mark a turning point of spiraling decline for the Israelites due to their rebellion against God.

Rebellion brings strife and uncertainty. While we may not lead revolts against family members, our choice to not trust and follow God results in the same outcome. God’s Word is full of examples that remind us of the wisdom and life gained by following God’s path. It may not always be easy, but choosing His way always leads us in the right direction.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the path You’ve set before me. I know I haven’t always chosen to follow Your ways, and it never ends well. Help me always seek Your will for my life. I know Your ways always lead me along the right path — the life You have in store for me. In Jesus ’ name, Amen.

April 4 — The Ox and Donkey Team

READ

Judges 11:29-15:20

Judges 14:1-3, *“Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, ‘I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife. His father and mother replied, ‘Isn’t there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife? But Samson said to his father, ‘Get her for me. She’s the right one for me.’”*

2 Corinthians 6:14, *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”*

THINK

Imagine an ox and a donkey yoked together to plow a field. It’s a ludicrous spectacle to behold! The ox is double the height of the donkey, with legs nearly twice as long. So, while the ox plods along at a rather slow pace, the little donkey has to run as fast as it can to keep up. Concurrently, as this unorthodox team pulls the plow, it swerves side to side, creating rows that look like ocean waves rather than straight lines. Paul had this spectacle in mind when he exhorted the Christians in Corinth — and us — not to be bound with unbelievers.

In the passage above, we see Samson — as strong as an ox — seeking to marry a donkey — a woman who couldn’t keep the pace spiritually. He was determined to marry a pagan despite his parents’ objections — objections that were rooted in the fact that he’d been set apart by God to lead Israel. Unfortunately, his marriage didn’t make it past the reception, and soon after, his new bride lost her life over a dispute between Samson and her people, the Philistines. As we’ll continue to discover in tomorrow’s reading, his issue with the ladies didn’t end there.

Unequal alliances go against God’s will for two reasons. First, a yoke constrains; it doesn’t permit independent action. It compels us to comply with our partner, whether we like it or not. Second, it can easily become permanent and difficult to break free from.

Be smart! Don’t go Samson’s way and be yoked to the wrong people. God’s desire is for you to be free and confident, able to function and fulfill His good and perfect will for your life.

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for the wise guidelines You’ve placed in my life. I choose to be equally yoked, knowing that Your way of doing life is always for my best interest. In all that I do and say, I want my life to glorify You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

April 5 — Just Once More

READ

Judges 16:1-18:31

Judges 16:21-22, *“Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison. **But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.**”*

Judges 16:26-28, *“Samson said to the servant who held his hand, ‘Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them. Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the Lord, ‘Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.’”*

THINK

Samson was in a place of defeat. Disobedient to God and off-purpose, he was tricked, blinded, humiliated, bound, and sent to work in prison. We’re all a little “Samson” when a sin that starts with, “Just this once,” turns into a repetitive pattern. Though our circumstances may be different, we can find ourselves in places we never intended.

The gift of strength left Samson the moment his head was shaved, and the Bible says God left him. Think of his loneliness and remorse! He likely felt he was no longer useful to God. What purpose could he serve now that he was weak and blind? But perhaps one night while he was sitting in a dark cell, he scratched his head and noticed something: The hair on his head had started to grow.

Like a person stumbling around in the dark and finally finding the light switch, Samson realized that he might still be useful to God. Instead of the *“just this once”* attitude he’d held towards sin, he pleaded with God to be useful *“just once more.”*

Samson prayed, and God responded in a big way — his strength returned one last time. Samson had turned back to God, who used him more powerfully through his repentance than in all his previous actions combined!

If “just this once” has become a slippery slope of repetitive sin in your life, it’s time to turn back to God. Repent for your bad decisions — just turn around — and say, “God, I’m ready to serve You **once more!**”

PRAY

Lord, You are my hope and my salvation. Today, help me “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let me run with perseverance the race marked out for me. (Hebrews 12:1)” In Jesus 'name, Amen.

April 6 — The Ultimate King

READ

Judges 19:1-21:25

Judges 19:1a, *“Now in those days Israel had no king.”*

Judges 21:25, *“In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.”*

THINK

This section of Scripture is filled with horrific and appalling events. You may never want to read it again, but isn't it interesting how it bookends by saying the same thing? “Israel had no king.”

This meant there was no human king over Israel. But, also, they did not recognize God's leadership over them as the ultimate King.

Can't we say the same about our world today? And is it true of us?

Jesus is the one and only King of kings. If He is not the Lord of your life, anything goes: truth is relative, you can do whatever you want, and the list goes on and on. But if God reigns over your life, you will follow His way. You will see that God is absolute truth, as revealed in Scripture. You will work to do what God wants you to do because you know His way is best.

So, ask yourself today, who is King over your life? Are you doing what is right in your own eyes — following the way of the world — or are you following the Creator of the universe?

PRAY

Dear God, Thank You for being the King of kings. Keep reminding me of who I am and whose I am. I am Your child, a child of the ultimate King. Amen.

April 7 — Who are You Clinging To?

READ

Ruth 1:1-4:12

Ruth 1:14-16, *“At this, they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ‘Look,’ said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her. But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’”*

THINK

Naomi, a Hebrew, left Bethlehem during a famine and moved with her husband and two sons to Moab, a nation that worshiped many gods. While living in this foreign land, tragedy struck. Naomi’s husband died, followed by her two sons. She was destitute. Her only remaining family there were her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. So, when she learned there was no longer a famine in Bethlehem, she decided to return to her homeland. Before setting off on her journey, she urged both of them to return to their families and build a new life for themselves — but both women decided to stay with Naomi.

As they began their journey, she once again urged them to return home. Orpah left her, but Ruth clung to Naomi — and with it, she clung to God. At that moment, Ruth committed to remaining with her mother-in-law, leaving behind her family, her culture, her gods, and all that was comfortable and familiar. What Ruth must’ve seen and learned from Naomi about God convinced her that He was worth following at all cost!

This leaves us with two questions:

1. Who or what are you clinging to?
2. Who is the Ruth in your life – someone who is searching for ultimate truth and purpose?

As we’ll discover in tomorrow’s reading, Ruth made a God-ordained decision that led to her being a part of the lineage of Christ. So, cling to God and intentionally lead others towards the life of purpose and promise that’s only found in Him!

PRAY

Lord, Let me cling to nothing besides You and to those who propel me towards living out Your best! Let there be no comfort, no tradition, or no convenience that I hold higher than following You. And as I wholeheartedly commit to You, help me to set an example for others who have yet to accept You as their personal Lord and Savior! Amen.

April 8 — The Greatest Love Story of All Time

READ

Ruth 4:13-22

1 Chronicles 2:9-55

1 Chronicles 4:1-23

1 Samuel 1:1-18

Ruth 4:13-15, *“So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son ‘...Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you.’”*

THINK

Difficult circumstances come upon us and shake our world. People come and go as we intersect their existence. But is there any rhyme or reason for the timing and happenstance of it all? Even though things may look bleak, and we feel stuck within our routines or struggles, there is hope. God provides; He uses the interweaving of lives and experiences for His glorious plan and purpose.

Ruth was surrounded with difficult circumstances of her own. She'd lost her husband, left behind all that was familiar, and was caring for her mother-in-law, Naomi. In biblical times, if a husband died, a woman had to fight to survive. It was almost impossible to live without a male guardian or husband. So, Ruth had to literally work for scraps just to have enough food. One of the few solutions was for a male relative of the husband to step into the gap the husband had left behind. As the kinsman-redeemer, his role was to deliver and rescue the family member in need.

Enter Boaz, a relative of Naomi, who qualified for the part. And raise the curtain on one of the greatest love stories of all time! Ruth and Boaz fell in love, and he took her to be his bride. As their kinsman-redeemer, Boaz delivered and rescued Ruth and Naomi and gave them hope. And, the son that he and Ruth had continued the lineage that eventually led to Christ – the ultimate Redeemer.

This story foreshadows Jesus as our Redeemer, who delivers and rescues us from sin. And like Ruth, the Church is His Bride — made up of people who have accepted His gift of grace. When we look back at how God has worked in our lives, we can see that His timing is perfect. We are a part of His majestic tapestry. And just like Ruth and Boaz, we'll live happily ever after face-to-face with Jesus in the great hereafter! And there's no better love story than that!

PRAY

Lord, Thank You so much for being our Kinsman-Redeemer, giver of grace. We praise You for intersecting our lives and blessing our path with Your goodness. Amen.