

Introduction

We've all heard the saying, "You are what you eat". This has to be nuanced: I eat a lot of eggs, but I'm not made of eggs. What it means is that if you eat in an unhealthy manner, you are far more likely to be unhealthy. What you consume affects your body to a great degree. Research in recent years shows a tremendous connection between physical health and diet and also between mental health and diet. You are, in a real sense, what you eat.

Jesus said something related, though it may not readily appear to be related. In his Sermon on the Mount he instructs his disciples to not store up treasure on earth. Instead, they must work to store up treasure in heaven, for treasure in heaven is incorruptible. It cannot be lost or rust or be eaten by bugs. It cannot be stolen. Then he said this:

Mt 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Matthew 6:21

If you want to know where a person's heart is, where his or her true affections lie, then see where that person's treasure is. See what he spends his time pursuing. See how she spends her money. See what they do with their resources. A person whose life is filled with drama is a person who *invests in drama*. A person whose life is filled with anger and resentment is a person who *invests in anger and resentment*. Whatever you feed your mind with, remember: you are what you eat. Where your treasure is, your heart will be also.

If you constantly tell yourself all the things you do not have that others have, you will become envy. If you constantly remind yourself of all the ways others have wronged you or disrespected you or have dismissed you, you will become anger. If you constantly worry about your physical appearance and whether others find you attractive, you will become vanity. If you constantly fret about the future, whether in concern over your physical health or your financial health or whether your company will downsize or whether you will get married—or stay married, you will become fear.

If, however, you invest in seeing this world from God's perspective, and you remind yourself of God's goodness and kindness, and you live a life of repentance and faith, and you seek first his kingdom in every decision you make, you will discover that despair has no place in your life. You will discover that fear cannot find a foothold in your life. You will discover that frustration and failure and an overwhelming sense of your own inadequacy simply cannot define you, for your treasure will be in the truth of God in Christ, driven deep into your heart by the Spirit. This is where we find victory. We're in Judges 9.

Jdgs 9:22 Abimelech ruled over Israel three years. ²³ And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴ that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who

killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. ²⁵ And the leaders of Shechem put men in ambush against him on the mountaintops, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way. And it was told to Abimelech.

²⁶ And Gaal the son of Ebed moved into Shechem with his relatives, and the leaders of Shechem put confidence in him. ²⁷ And they went out into the field and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them and held a festival; and they went into the house of their god and ate and drank and reviled Abimelech. ²⁸ And Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abimelech, and who are we of 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 Would that this people were under my hand! Then I would remove Abimelech. I would say to Abimelech, 'Increase your army, and come out.'

³⁰ When Zebul the ruler of the city heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was kindled. ³¹ And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Behold, Gaal the son of Ebed and his relatives have come to Shechem, and they are stirring up the city against you. ³² Now therefore, go by night, you and the people who are with you, and set an ambush in the field. ³³ Then in the morning, as soon as the sun is up, rise early and rush upon the city. And when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may do to them as your hand finds to do."

³⁴ So Abimelech and all the men who were with him rose up by night and set an ambush against Shechem in four companies. ³⁵ And Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city, and Abimelech and the people who were with him rose from the ambush. ³⁶ And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the mountaintops!" And Zebul said to him, "You mistake the shadow of the mountains for men." ³⁷ Gaal spoke again and said, "Look, people are coming down from the center of the land, and one company is coming from the direction of the Diviners' Oak." ³⁸ Then Zebul said to him, "Where is your mouth now, you who said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out now and fight with them." ³⁹ And Gaal went out at the head of the leaders of Shechem and fought with Abimelech. ⁴⁰ And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him. And many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹ And Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives, so that they could not dwell at Shechem.

⁴² On the following day, the people went out into the field, and Abimelech was told. ⁴³ He took his people and divided them into three companies and set an ambush in the fields. And he looked and saw the people coming out of the city. So he rose against them and killed them. ⁴⁴ Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city, while the two companies rushed upon all who were in the field and killed them. ⁴⁵ And Abimelech fought against the city all that day. He captured the city and killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with

salt.

⁴⁶ When all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-berith. ⁴⁷ Abimelech was told that all the leaders of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. ⁴⁸ And Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an axe in his hand and cut down a bundle of brushwood and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men who were with him, “What you have seen me do, hurry and do as I have done.” ⁴⁹ So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abimelech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about 1,000 men and women.

⁵⁰ Then Abimelech went to Thebez and encamped against Thebez and captured it. ⁵¹ But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to it and shut themselves in, and they went up to the roof of the tower. ⁵² And Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire. ⁵³ And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull. ⁵⁴ Then he called quickly to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me, ‘A woman killed him.’” And his young man thrust him through, and he died. ⁵⁵ And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, everyone departed to his home. ⁵⁶ Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. ⁵⁷ And God also made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

Judges 9:22–57

Chaos

When we read Scripture, and especially the narrative sections of it, it is easy to miss the lived experience of those who were there. For example, our text begins with the words, “Abimelech ruled over Israel three years”. When it says “over Israel” it doesn’t mean he was king over all twelve tribes. It means what it means when it says a person “judged Israel”—he was judge with authority over Israelites, but not all Israelites. The judges were local or perhaps regional leaders in Israel. The men of Shechem made Abimelech king and he ruled over that small part of the nation for three years.

Here’s where we miss the lived experience of it. The text doesn’t say much about those three years. How did Abimelech come to be king? Remember, he received money from Baal-berith’s treasury and used that money—a small amount, I might add—to hire “worthless and reckless fellows” to follow him. Together this small army went to his father’s estate and brutally executed his 70 brothers, one by one. When a man comes to power in such a brutal and bloodthirsty manner, he does not suddenly become a wise and benevolent and beneficent ruler. He simply *is* a brutal and bloodthirsty ruler.

He ruled over Shechem and its surrounding villages in this manner. It’s interesting the text does not say *God* raised up an oppressor over them, yet they have an oppressor who

has been raised up to rule over them. During Gideon's lifetime they whored after the golden ephod he made. As soon as he died chapter 8 says they whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god and they did not remember the Lord their God. In this case the Lord didn't have to raise up someone to discipline his people for they chose one of their own—literally. The people of Shechem made Abimelech king and Abimelech oppressed them for three years with more of the violence and chaotic fear that characterized his life.

It's also interesting the text does not say God raised up a deliverer for them. Rather, God himself intervenes directly to deal with Abimelech and with the Shechemites. In verse 23 we read "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem". This does not mean God sent a demon to them. Christians have wrestled with the very notion of evil for quite some time. The question is often asked where evil came from; if God created everything that exists does that mean he created evil?

It does not. Evil is not actually a thing, but the absence of a thing. Evil is like cold: we call the absence of heat "cold" but cold is not actually a thing we can create. Your car's air conditioner is not producing cold. Rather, it is taking heat from the air inside the car, concentrating it, and moving that heat outside the car. It doesn't *create* cold; it *removes* heat. It's clunky to say, "There is a tremendous absence of heat in the atmosphere today" so we say, "It's really cold outside".

Evil is the absence of good. When God created, he declared his creation was very good. When Adam sinned against God, his actions lacked the positive quality of good. This absence of good is what we call evil. There is, of course, *moral* evil. When someone harms another, the actions of harm lack good and since people are responsible for their actions, this is a moral evil. There is also natural evil. When wildfires destroy homes and businesses and take human life, there is a lack of good in the fire. This is a natural evil. The fire is not morally culpable, yet it does not contain the positive quality of good.

The evil spirit God sent to Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem is merely God allowing the spirit between them—the relationship—to continue on its natural course, and given Abimelech's character and the character of the men of Shechem, that spirit lacked good. Hence the spirit between them was evil. Verse 23 says the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech. Apparently they quickly began to regret making him king.

God is working behind the scenes in this. God is always doing 10,000 things and sometimes he lets us see some of them. His purpose in allowing this relationship to deteriorate is stated in verse 24: "that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers".

This isn't karma; this is God's justice. Sin always produces death. It may be pleasurable for a time but the inevitable outcome of sin is always death. The sin of Abimelech and the sin of the men of Shechem who empowered the evil and brutality of Abimelech is producing death. And what is death? It is the *absence of life*.

We see this absence of life in verse 25. These men who chose Abimelech as their king put men in ambush for him. They were seeking to kill him if he happened to come to their city. Notice the end of verse 25, though. Their evil only produced more evil: "and they robbed all who passed by them along that way".

The oppression of God's people is not coming from a foreign enemy, but from within. The men of Shechem were largely non-Israelites, but they are those who were allowed to

remain in the land. They had, for the most part, assimilated into the people of Israel. As we've seen, the conquest of Canaan was not about purging the land of non-Israelites, but about purging the land of idolatry. Israel not only refuses to purge the land of Canaanite idolatry, Israel is participating in that idolatry. For this reason the oppression comes from within.

Try to imagine the chaos of this. The people know there are roads they cannot travel at night. If they do, they'll get robbed and there is no one to help them and no one to protect them. They know there are roads you can't travel at any time of day. There are sections of the land you don't go to because of the danger. What do you do if "the wrong part of town" *is your entire town?*

This is the chaos of life under Abimelech, Israel's self-chosen ruler. This is the chaos of sin. It is the absence of good in every area of life, and it brings suffering to God's people.

Drunken Boasting

In verse 26 a man named Gaal moves into Shechem with his extended family. Given his deep knowledge of Shechem and how quickly the leaders of Shechem warm up to him, it seems as though he is from Shechem originally. Perhaps he left when they made Abimelech king, knowing how that would turn out. Perhaps he's aware of the hostility between them and Abimelech and thinks the time is right to come back.

As it happens it was harvest. They gathered their grapes and trod them into juice to make wine. They have a massive party, a festival, and celebrated in their temple for feasting. They ate and drank and no doubt many got drunk. Gaal seems to have been quite drunk. In verse 28 he loudly boasts against Abimelech, asking why "we who are of Shechem" should serve him. In verse 29 he not-so-subtly suggests what he would do if he were in charge: he would challenge Abimelech directly, and would even taunt him to increase his army!

He seems to know Abimelech's "army" is a bunch of worthless and reckless fellows. What do you get when you add worthless and reckless fellows to an army of worthless and reckless fellows? *An army of worthless and reckless fellows.* In his drunken state, Gaal is pretty confident how such a fight would turn out.

There's a couple other things in there to notice, however. Yes, the degree of boasting is higher because of the wine, but there's more being said. In verse 28 he asked, "Is he not the son of Jerubbaal?". His name was Gideon. The people named him Jerubbaal because he tore down his father's altar to Baal. Given the power his father had, they couldn't touch Gideon though they wanted to kill him for it. They nicknamed him Jerubbaal—"let Baal fight 'em". By connecting Abimelech to the one who fought Baal he's diminishing him even further in their eyes. Remember, they made Baal-berith their god! Abimelech is the son of the one who causes all their problems!

Further, he includes Zebul. He taunts Zebul, Abimelech's officer. It turns out that Abimelech doesn't live in what is supposed to be his capital city. He lives in Arumah, a nearby town. He doesn't even trust his own "subjects" enough to live among them, so he has a representative who essentially governs the city of Shechem for him.

It is quite interesting that Abimelech's name means "my father is king" and the one drunkenly boasting against him is Gaal the son of Ebed—Gaal, the son of *a servant*. It's not

hard to see the animosity this portrays. Surely there is jealousy and envy and utter dislike between these men. It is likely they've known each other a very long time.

Unfortunately for Gaal, Zebul hears about it. We don't know where he stands. The text isn't clear if he's truly for Abimelech or for himself. He seems to be a master politician capable of playing both sides. Verse 30 says when he heard of the taunts of Gaal "his anger was kindled". Was it kindled because Gaal spoke against Abimelech or because he included Zebul in his taunts?

Zebul sent messengers to Abimelech secretly to inform him of the growing rebellion. He gives Abimelech the makings of a battle plan. This may suggest that Abimelech is not a great military leader. Given the soldiers he chose to hire, this is almost certainly the case. The plan seems to be a good plan, involving an ambush in the morning. He knows Gaal and his men will rush out of the city to fight. Zebul, however, doesn't give him any strategy beyond this. He tells him, essentially, "You'll figure it out."

Will he? Will he and his worthless rabble "figure it out", or will Gaal and his men already have it figured out? We're left wondering which side Zebul is on. Abimelech takes his advice and sets an ambush against the city—*his city*, mind you, the city that made him *king*. This is the chaos of sin!

Remember that Shechem is in valley of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. In the morning the sun rises in the east and the light would slowly work its way down the mountain, as the peaks would get sunlight first. As the shadows move about, the light can play tricks on your eyes. Gaal gets up the next morning and is looking out the city gate and sees shadows moving. He told Zebul—the city manager or mayor or captain of the guard—men were coming down from the mountains. There was only one reason a large group of men would be coming like that. Zebul, however, delays. He trolls Gaal, "Nah. They're just shadows. You're being *paranoid*."

Some time later Gaal knows for sure they are men. They are no longer coming over the mountain but "coming down from the center of the land"—in the valley—with another group coming from another direction. Shadows don't move in different directions! Then Zebul springs his trap. Remember, he is angry for Gaal's drunken boast in which he blasted Zebul as Abimelech's officer. He asks him in verse 38, "Where is your mouth now?"

The Ancient Near East was an honor/shame society. This was a worse confrontation between Zebul and Gaal than a physical altercation. By calling out Gaal's boasting, Gaal has no choice but to engage Abimelech in battle. He had, after all, boasted that even if Abimelech increased his army, Gaal would beat him. Gaal took the men of Shechem and met Abimelech outside the city walls. Verse 40.

Jdgs 9:40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled before him. And many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹ And Abimelech lived at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his relatives, so that they could not dwell at Shechem.
Judges 9:40–41

Why does Gaal flee "up to the entrance of the gate"? When it was clear they were defeated, why didn't they retreat into the safety of the city, protected by its walls and its gate? Zebul was the officer in charge of the city. It was his to protect, and he protected his city by preventing Gaal and his men from entering.

Notice the author says Abimelech lived at Arumah, while it was Zebul who drove Gaal and his relatives out of the city. Notice that Abimelech, who had been made king by the men of Shechem, does not enter *his city* in triumph. “His city” belongs to Zebul. It turns out Zebul is on Zebul’s side.

Anger and Rage

The day after this battle, the battle in which Abimelech was both victorious and defeated, for he could not even enter his capital city, he once again lay in wait, ready to ambush the people. In verse 43 he divided his men into three groups. Remember, he’s just like his father! His father divided his “army” into three groups, too, only his “army” was given the task of calling everyone to worship, not to fight.

Remember also that he has Gideon’s sense of revenge. In the morning the citizens of Shechem left the protection of the city walls and the city gate. They had work to do, after all. Sure, there had been a battle the day before, but crops still have to be planted. Sheep still had to be sheared. Cows still had to be milked. Fields still had to be plowed.

When the gate was opened and the people came out, Abimelech attacked. He sent one of his companies of men to the gate to secure it and keep it open and the other two companies attacked the farmers and shepherds and craftsmen and laborers, and killed them. Verse 45 tells us he fought against the city all day, finally capturing it—his *capital city*, and destroying it. The author says he “killed the people who were in it, and he razed the city and sowed it with salt”.

Sowing a field with salt would render a field useless for growing crops. Crops cannot be watered with salt water and if you mix salt into the soil, even rain would dissolve the salt and you would be watering the field with salt water. It says he sowed *the city* with salt. This is likely a metaphorical way to reinforce the destruction of the city. He rendered it useless and incapable of supporting life.

The level of destruction is baffling. Once again we see Abimelech, like his father, is filled with vengeance and a desire to prove he’s somebody. He’s not done, either. After destroying the city of Shechem, he sets his sights on “the Tower of Shechem”. This is likely a nearby village that was a fortress. Similar to Jericho, few people would live in the fortress. During an attack people would retreat into it for shelter. Fortresses would contain stores of food and water and the things necessary to survive a siege.

When the leaders of this fortress heard about the destruction of Shechem, they gathered the people into the fortress for protection. Abimelech learned they had gathered in there and still filled with his anger and rage, he took his worthless and reckless army and began cutting wood and told them to cut wood as well. They stacked the wood up along the outside of the tower and set fire to it, killing 1,000 men and women, and almost certainly, children as well.

Remember that Abimelech is the son of Gideon’s concubine, a woman Gideon refused to marry. He had several wives already; she was just extra. There is no doubt he was treated the same way—just extra. Besides, Gideon has 70 other sons—plus daughters!—to expend his love and affection on, as fathers do. Abimelech’s been seething with anger and rage his entire life. His lust for vengeance boiled over when he brutally and systematically murdered his brothers. It continues with the horrific attack on these men *and women* in the tower.

Most likely they died from the smoke, but the evil in this attack is extraordinary. His anger and rage is still not satisfied.

Judgment

Abimelech took his worthless and reckless army to Thebez. Thebez is likely another village of Shechem. It, too, contained a fortress. Fortresses were defensive; folk would retreat into a fortress when attacked. Verse 51 doesn't say Thebez merely *had* a tower, but a *strong* tower. All the men and women and all the leaders of the city fled to the tower when they saw Abimelech's army marching toward them. Once again Abimelech approached the tower to burn it with fire. Verse 53, however.

Jdgs 9:53 And a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head
and crushed his skull.
Judges 9:53

An upper millstone is a household appliance. This is likely a small millstone used for daily food preparation. In the tower there would be supplies of grain. Rather than mill a bunch of wheat and store *flour* in the tower, the kernels would be stored as they have a longer shelf-life. Since they couldn't predict when an attack would come or how long it would last, tools for food preparation, as well as weapons for defense, would be stored in the tower.

A milling appliance consisted of two parts: the lower millstone and the upper millstone. The upper millstone had a small hole in the center and grooves carved into the bottom. With the handle a woman—this was women's work in that day—would put grain in the center hole and grind it by turning the upper millstone. The grooves would pull the grain in between the upper and lower millstones and grind them into flour. The upper millstone would be removed and the flour poured out into a bowl.

The upper millstone would weigh between five and ten pounds—about the weight of a bag of flour at Meijer. This certain woman cannot meet a man in armed combat. Men as a whole are bigger, stronger, and faster than women, and further, men were more likely to be trained in combat. She does what she can, just like Jael did with Sisera, and she drops the millstone onto Abimelech's head.

The result is as expected, but it's also unexpected. It crushes his skull, as verse 53 says, but he remains conscious. How! Surely this is part of the judgment on his brutality! He remains aware of his end, and knows it was a woman who threw the millstone. It is likely that as he lay there bleeding, the woman and others on top of the tower were taunting and jeering him.

Being in an honor/shame culture and having had his skull crushed by a woman's kitchen appliance, Abimelech instructs his armor-bearer to draw his sword and kill him so that no one could say, "A woman killed him". With his gray matter leaking out, the worst thing that came to mind was that a woman took his life.

Centuries later, when David was king, his close friend Uriah the Hittite was killed in battle. His military commander Joab gave instructions to a messenger for how to deliver the news of Uriah's death to David. As part of the message he said to ask him this:

2 Sam 11:21 Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? ~~Why did you go so near the wall? then you shall say, ‘Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.’~~”

2 Samuel 11:21

Well, so much for not letting people say that. It’s interesting that Joab changes the name “Jerubbaal” to “Jerubbesheth”—from “let Baal fight ’em” to “let shame fight ’em”. The last thing Abimelech wanted was more shame so he had his armor-bearer thrust him through with a sword. Old Testament scholar Daniel Stulac noted,

Thus, “My Father Is King” will be remembered forever as having died in exactly the manner he wished to avoid: simultaneously emasculated like Sisera and slashed through his belly like Eglon (Judg 9:53–54).

Daniel J. D. Stulac, “Gift of the Grotesque”

As soon as Abimelech’s men saw that he was dead, the text says everyone just went home. No sense of vengeance. No hint of loyalty. No desire to honor his name by defeating those who killed him. They just went home as if it were, you know, *Tuesday*. This is what sin does: it promises you the world, but leaves you broken and bleeding and alone.

Application

One of the significant questions we ask in general and of this text in particular is why? Why does it take so long for God to bring evil to an end? This false king is raised up by his own people as an oppressor of Israel and God does not stop him from his—and their—reign of terror for three long years. Again, think of the lived experience of the people at this time. They experience violence because of the hostility between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. The workers in the city weren’t part of that. Those who plowed fields and tended the vineyards and sheared sheep weren’t part of that, yet they all suffered.

Why does God show so much patience with Abimelech’s evil? Let me reframe that question in a way that will make each one of us rather uncomfortable: why does God show so much patience with *your* sin? With *my* sin? It’s much easier to ask about God’s patience with the sin of others but the same patience God displays with Abimelech’s sin is the patience I’ve experienced. I have never murdered a single person, let alone 70, but the same patience on display in Abimelech is the patience I experience for grumbling.

Here’s the reality: God patiently waited because he was giving Abimelech time to repent and believe. He could have turned from his sin and through the sacrificial system given to Israel, Abimelech could have atoned for his sin. I cannot know all the reasons God delayed judgment and allowed his evil to run amok, but I know of at least one reason: his mercy. Again and again Abimelech was given opportunity to turn from his evil, and he refused.

God will not be mocked. His holiness and his justice are undefeated. Verses 56–57 make it clear that God returned the evil of Abimelech back upon him and he made all the evil of the men of Shechem return on their heads. This ain’t karma. This is justice. This is God’s faithfulness to his covenant. This is God keeping his word, for God remains true to his word even when no one else will.

Sin is a dangerous thing. It only brings suffering and pain and destruction. It cannot give life, though it promises to do so. You might be able to shield yourself from the effects of sin for a time, but you cannot stop *a certain woman* from showing up with a kitchen appliance. Sin will always be revealed for what it is, and it is never pretty.

I don't know if there is anyone here who has murdered someone. I am quite confident, however, that the warning of Jesus that being filled with anger and rage is the same as murder, and therefore there are those here who are, in fact, guilty of murder. I am quite confident there are those here who are guilty of adultery as well for in the words of Jesus, to look upon someone with lust is to commit adultery. He also spoke about those whose "yes" and "no" cannot be trusted and those who desire vengeance and retribution—you know, an eye for an eye.

Whatever the manifestation of sin is in your life, the Lord is calling us to kill it, to lay it on the altar and allow it to remain there. You see, woven throughout this sordid story of great evil is a shadow of the King. In Abimelech's day the King was still far in the future. For many it seemed as though he would never come. And when he came, he didn't come like anyone expected, for he did not come wielding a sword ready to destroy God's enemies. He came *for* God's enemies, but not to pour out vengeance on them. He came for God's enemies, that he might *rescue* them.

Think of how he came to rescue: he became Abimelech and Gideon. He became you and he became me. Here's how Paul put it:

^{2 Cor 5:21} For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God became one of us that he might take our sin upon himself and offer himself as the sacrifice that takes away our sin. The outcome of all this work is that we would become the righteousness of God. He takes our sin upon himself and lays his righteousness on us. There is only one who can make us holy. There is only one who can save.

In the midst of this dark and dreadful story that so many find depressing is the very solution to the struggle we all have, for the story of Abimelech shows us we cannot save ourselves. It shows us what our sin—your sin, my sin, his sin, her sin, their sin—would look like if allowed to run freely. God has chosen to intervene by granting us mercy and grace, that he might transform us.

Church, just as God has called us as a body to "reclaim the land", so to speak, to drive idolatry out of the land, so we must do what Israel was called to do: we must drive idolatry—sin—out of our hearts. We must invest ourselves in seeing this world from God's perspective, in embracing his perspective on our sin and our struggles. We must learn to love what he loves and hate what he hates. We must allow his Spirit to change us from the inside out, driving out darkness and despair by filling us with hope and with faith.

Abimelech illustrates the truth for us: where your treasure is, there your heart will be. We must treasure the Lord Jesus and his gospel, for if we will, we will soon discover our hearts are being changed.