

Sunday 31st July 2022
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Judges 2:6-19
Theme: “The idols of *our* generation”
“Cry out to God for help!”

Introduction:

Quite a while ago now, the singer Bob Dylan sang a popular song called: “The times they are a-changin’”. Well, I don’t know if you remember the song at all, but certainly most of us know that what the song is saying is certainly true. The beliefs and values of most people in the Western world and here in Australia have changed markedly over the last decades....

Things have changed a mighty lot in Australia in the last 60-70 years or so.... Back in the 1950’s, for example, almost everyone believed in God, some 33% of Australians worshipped regularly, and many *if not most* children had some contact with the Christian Church through Sunday School *or through Religious Education at school* (cf. *Wilson, Can God survive in Australia?*, p. 14f).

But that’s certainly not the case now! Now, the number of people who say that they believe in God is declining rapidly. Less than 10% of people worship regularly in a Christian church, very few children have contact with the children’s ministry of our churches, and most people in Australian society are “practical atheists”. In other words, they live their life as if God doesn’t exist. They may say that they believe in God, but their whole life is lived as if God doesn’t exist (cf *2021 Census results in Addenda*).

We are living in a Post-Christian culture, no more than that, we are living in what is largely an anti-Christian culture. Witness the way that Richard Dawkin’s book *The God Delusion* was received by our society when it came out *a while back*: it was received with applause and adulation. Why? ...Because it seems to give intellectual support to the life-style of many people in Australia, *those who live their life as if God doesn’t exist....*

This generation in the Western World, *and here in Australia*, has largely forgotten God and, *dare I say it*, is worshipping idols....

This is what the writer (*lit. editor*) of the book of Judges says about the

Israelites after the death of Joshua:

“That whole generation of those who worshipped the Lord God...died, and the next generation forgot the Lord and what he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10).

But who would have thought *back 60-70 years* ago that this could happen here too in Australia?! Let’s investigate this morning what happened with the Israelites, and then we’ll look in greater depth at what’s happened here in Australia in recent years. And then I want us to think about what God wants us to do to change the situation here in Australia, here in South Australia, and here in our local area.

Part 1: The situation of the Israelites

Well, firstly let’s investigate what happened to the Israelites who had crossed the Jordan led by Joshua (*Joshua 3:17*). They lived in the land of Canaan, the land that God had promised to give to them (*e.g. Gen. 12:7*). This involved living among people who didn’t worship the Lord God and instead worshipped idols. Listen to what happened to them after they settled in the land of Canaan. The writer of the book of Judges tell us what happened.

He writes:

Joshua sent the people of Israel on their way, and each man went to take possession of his own share of the land. As long as Joshua lived, the people of Israel served the Lord, and after his death they continued to do so as long the leaders were alive who had seen for themselves all the great thing that the Lord had done for Israel. The Lord’s servant Joshua son of Nun died at the age of a hundred and ten....

That whole generation also died, and the next generation forgot the Lord and what he had done for Israel.

Then the people of Israel sinned against the Lord and began to serve the Baals. They stopped worshipping the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God who had brought them out of Egypt, and they began to worship other gods, the gods of the people around them.... They stopped worshipping the Lord and served the Baals and the Astartes. And so the Lord became furious with Israel and let raiders attack and rob them... (*Judges 2:6-14*).

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do”. This is an old saying, and it sort of sums up what the Israelites did after Joshua and his generation had died. The Israelites “forgot the Lord” and began worshipping the idols of the Canaanites: the Baals and the Astartes.

Baal and Astarte were the male and female gods of the Canaanites, who believed that these so called gods sent the rain necessary for the crops to grow. They believed that when Baal and Astarte got together sexually in heaven, then it would rain and the crops would grow.

And how do you encourage the gods to get together sexually? Those who practiced this fertility religion “believed that they could manipulate the gods into having sexual relations *and so making it rain* if men had sexual relations with a sacred prostitute in a shrine or temple” (*H. Wendt, STS, p. 30, 31*).

It is little wonder that God wasn’t pleased with his people and allowed raiders to attack his people! They had turned away from worshipping Him, and instead were doing what the people of the land were doing....

Before I go on, can I point out to you the structure of the stories in the book of Judges.... The story of each of the major judges, *or deliverers or rescuers*, judges like Deborah, and Gideon, and Samson, is set in a framework that relates Israel’s national fortunes to the people’s faithfulness. The framework is as follows:

- * **Apostasy:** Israel sins
- * **Battering:** God uses neighbouring nations to punish his people
- * **Cry:** Israel cries to the Lord for help
- * **Deliverance:** The Lord raises up a judge to deliver His people (*Crossways, p. 29*).

In the bible, the framework reads as follows:

- * **“The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord by....”** (*sin specified*).
- * **“The Lord gave them over to...(name of oppressor) who oppressed them for years”.**
- * **“When the Israelites cried to the Lord for help, the Lord raised up... (name of judge) to deliver them”**

- * **The story of the judge is then recounted, and the section is closed with, “The land enjoyed peace for ... years” (e.g., Judges 2:11-19; 3:12-30; 4:1-3; 6:1-7).**

Well, where were we? I had just pointed out that “it is little wonder that God wasn’t pleased with his people and allowed raiders to attack his people! They had turned away from worshipping Him, and instead were doing what the people of the land were doing...”.

Part 2: The situation of us in Australia

Does it sound familiar.... “They had turned away from worshipping Him, and instead were doing what the people of the land were doing”.

That’s exactly what many in our generation in Australia are doing.... Instead of worshipping the God who made everything and who rescued us through His Son Jesus, many people whose families have known and worshipped God in the past have turned away from God and are living their life just like those around them: with the beliefs and the values of those around them.

What are the idols of ordinary Australians?

Well, one writer puts it this way:

“Look at what your hope is in. There you will find your true religion”, *there you will find your idols*” (Mark Sayers, *The Trouble with Paris*, p. 32).

What are ordinary Australians *who have turned away from God* putting their hope in? Well, let’s think for a bit:

- * Money

If you have enough money, you can buy the good life for yourself. Allied with this belief is a pre-occupation with continually buying new things for yourself, in the belief that these things will make you happy (*Materialism, Consumerism*).

- * Pleasure

Most Australians are “hedonists”, people who continually seek after the next pleasurable experience. Mark Sayers in his wonderful little book says: “Life becomes a never-ending chase for experiences and pleasurable moments” (p. 26). His classic story is about a young lady who thinks that the solution to her

problems is to move to Paris (p. 21).

* Health, beauty

For many people in Australia, life revolves around being fit and healthy and attractive to others. This is what their whole life is focused on.

* Sex, relationships

Many people in Australian society put their hope in the next relationship with a person of the opposite sex.

Mark Sayers says: “The cell phone contract worldview tells us, ‘Don’t get stuck in a relationship. Even though the person you are with is attractive, someone better could be just around the corner. Somewhere there are better friends, better sex, a better experience, and a better product, so don’t get tired down. Relationships and commitments limit your options” (p. 50).

These are just some of the idols that ordinary Australians put their hope in: others include status, one’s family, one’s intelligence, and the list goes on and on of things that people around us *who have turned away from God or don’t know God* put their hope in and make an idol of.

The writer of the book of Judges says that the Israelites in the generation after Joshua “forgot the Lord” and “began to serve the Baals” (2:10, 11). That’s what has happened in many families here in Australia: the next generation *or two or three* has forgotten the Lord, and has begun to serve the idols of the land.

Let’s stop here for a short time of reflection:

* **What are you putting your hope and trust in? God? Or does your life revolve around the various idols of money, pleasure, health and beauty, sex and relationships and so on....**

* **What about your family and your friends? Who or what are they putting their hope in?**

Let’s go on.... What happened to the Israelites? Well, listen again to what the writer of Judges says:

And so the Lord became furious with Israel and let raiders attack and

rob them... (2:14).

God allowed them to be battered about by external enemies....

Do you think God is more than a little annoyed that people are turning their back on Him? Angry, yes, and saddened more so Do you think that God will be doing something similar these days to bring people back to their senses? I think so!

The battering that people in our society are receiving, though, is not by means of an external army invading us, *although I guess that even that is possible in the future*, but rather by the results of people turning their back on God: things like guilt and fear and emptiness and loneliness, and mental trauma and so on, *to name just a few of the things that God batters people with in order to bring them back to Him....*

Exhortation:

So what can we do about this situation which exists here in Australia, here in South Australia, here in our local area, here in our own extended family?

Well, the writer of the book of Judges gives us the answer: cry out to the Lord for help!! Listen to what the writer of the book of Judges says:

- * **“The Lord would have mercy on them because they groaned under their suffering and oppression” (2:18)**
- * **“Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he sent a man who freed them” (3:9)**
- * **“Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help” (4:3)**
- * **“Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help against the Midianites” (6:7).**

What can we who are God’s people, *His forgiven children*, do in the face of the situation in Australia where so many people around us, and even in our own extended family, are turned away from God, and *not to be blunt* are living their life in service of idols? What can we do?

1) Well, in the first instance, we can cry out to God in prayer. We can

again and again spend time praying for our extended family and our friends, for the city of Adelaide, for our State, and our country, *and that God will raise up Christian leaders to lead His people in these times where we are battered this way and that....*

2) And let God's Spirit in you move you to action for God as you pray for these people. For example, let's God's Spirit in you move you to:

- * Communicate the gospel to your children and your grandchildren. As one writer puts it:

Unless Jesus' followers communicate the reality of the gospel and the truth of God's Word, the next generation will never know" (*Essential 100*, p. 49).

No matter how old you are right now, you have an important mission for the rest of your life: to tell others, especially the younger people around you, about the reality of God, and what He has done for us all through Jesus.

One wonderful way that you can do this for the children around you is by getting a copy of *The Beginner's Bible*, and starting to read stories to them from this Bible....

- * Form friendships with people in your street, at your club, while you're shopping, while you're out walking, whatever you're doing, and be a listening ear to them as they share with you and pour out their troubles to you.
- * Share with others about God and how God has changed your life whenever you can! Don't be afraid! God will be with you, and even give you the words to say (*Mark 13:11*).
- * Invite friends and others to come to church with you (*e.g. families with young children*)

And as you pray to God for help, and let God's Spirit in you move you to action for Him, be assured that God will be working to answer your prayers and my prayers and give us *deliverance* from our situation, *as He did for the Israelites back in the time of the Judges.*

As we finish up, let's have another time of reflection:

- * **What are you doing? Are you crying out to God for help? Are**

**you praying for those around you?
Are letting God's Spirit in you move you to action?**

Conclusion:

And let's finish with prayer:

Dear God,

You know the cries of our heart for our loved ones who don't know you or who have turned their back on you, and for those around us who have no relationship with you. We pray for them, and we ask you to move us to action for them, so that through us *and through others* you may be able to lead them to know you as their loving Father, and Jesus as their Saviour and dear Friend.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Addenda:

* *2022 Census results*

The 2021 Census has revealed increasing diversity in the religions Australians identified, reflecting continuing changes in our social attitudes and belief systems.

Christianity is the most common religion in Australia, with over 40 per cent (43.9 per cent) identifying as Christian. This has reduced from over 50 per cent (52.1 per cent) in 2016 and from over 60 per cent (61.1 per cent) in 2011. As in earlier Censuses, the largest Christian denominations are Catholic (20.0 per cent of the population) and Anglican (9.8 per cent).

While fewer people are reporting their religion as Christian, more are reporting 'no religion'. **Almost 40 per cent (38.9 per cent) of Australia's population reported having no religion in the 2021 Census, an increase from 30 per cent (30.1 per cent) in 2016 and 22 per cent (22.3 per cent) in 2011.**