

Mountain Shadows

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MOUNTAIN SHADOWS

"And when Gaal saw the men, he said to Zebul, Look men are coming down from the mountain tops! And zebul said to him, You see the shadow of the mountains as if they were men." Judges 9:36 (RSV)

Before the days of Robinson Reminders and all the other gadgets we now have to help us remember what we ought to remember we used to "tie a string on a finger." The sight of that string - or perhaps we "changed rings" - was supposed to call out attention to something we were supposed to do. Now we have all these note-peg boards, magnetic bulletin boards, ~~and xix~~, and other modern ways of reminder. But there are other things we need to remember that are greater than just an errand or a grocery list. So we develop symbols to help us remember. We have symbols for traffic safety. Do you recall the advertisement that one oil company used a year or so ago in which were depicted all the different types of traffic signs -- stop, railroad crossing, curve, and many others. Each one has a distinctive shape so that if you learn this symbol you do not have to read the printing on the sign.

Our country erects monuments to remind us. This is a very old custom. Way back in the Old Testament when the children of Israel passed over Jordan Joshua was commanded to set up twelve stones, "that this may be a sign among you, when your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' Then you shall tell them that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. ... So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever." (Joshua 4:6-7)

Today I want to give you a new symbol. I discovered this symbol a long time ago. It is particularly useful here in the part of the country where we live. It is a handy symbol - you do not need to carry it with you. It is the shadows on the mountains.

The basis for this symbol comes from an old, old story in the ^{ninth} chapter of the Book of Judges. I know people who like to watch Westerns on TV. Well I want to tell you that the Old Testament has some stories that make our modern Westerns seem pretty tame.

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This story concerns three people named Abimelech, Gaal, and Zebul. You probably never heard of these people. On the other hand most of you have heard of Gideon. Gideon was a great hero. Abimelech was Gideon's son. When his father died Abimelech tried to take over his father's power. As a matter of fact he succeeded for a few years. He was not content to be just a chieftan or a "judge", he wanted to be king. He started out by hiring mercenaries and murdered all but one of his half-brothers -- there were seventy of them. The city of Shechem then declared him king. He represents the first real attempt at kingship in Israel. You see the idea of a king was a Canaanite idea and the city of Shechem was a Canaanite city. The real value of the story for the ancient people was that it showed the disastrous result of a union of the Israelites with idolaters.

Within this story there are several other stories. You should read the 9th chapter of Judges just to read Jotham's parable or fable of the trees. That is a sermon in itself. This morning I am interested in a story telling how a man named Gaal tried to rebel against Abimelech. We don't know who Gaal was because this is the only time he is mentioned. He really was no better than Abimelech so I cannot present ^{him} as a hero. He was just another greedy man who wanted to get power for himself. He did it in the classic manner. There was some discontent in Shechem so Gaal moved in and the book ^{tells} us "the men of Shechem put confidence in him." It is the old, old story of rebellion. The ruler of the city was a man named Zebul. He sent messengers to Abimelech to warn him and to give him a plan in order to put down the rebellion. One morning Gaal went out and stood in the entrance of the gate of the city and Abimelech's forces started to move in. This is what we read--"And when Gaal saw the men, he said to Zebul, Look, men are coming down from the mountain tops! And Zebul said to him, You see the shadow of the mountains as if they were men." The stragem worked and Abimelech defeated Gaal. Abimelech went on to some victories and final defeat at the hands of a woman. But look at the lesson from the shadows on the mountains.

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Jesus was said, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, A shower is coming; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, There will be scorching heat; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" This is a great concern -- to be able to tell shadows from men, to be able to recognize danger and distinguish between it a mere anxiety, To be aware in our lives of the direction from which the attack will come. Never any more do I look at the mountains and see the shadows and not ask myself, "Am I alert to the real dangers in my life?"

Sec #216

Mountain Shadows

"And when Gail saw the men, he said to Jehiel, Look men - a coming, down from the mountain tops! And Jehiel said to him, You see the shadow of the mountains as if they were men." Judges 7:36 (RSV)

Wald's Great Pil. Poetry - p. 642.

"Gail..... organized the rising against Abimelech by the disoriented in Shechem. Jehiel, Abimelech's officer there, warned his master, who came with a strong force and defeated the rebels under Gail's night attack. Gail and his brother were driven out of Shechem, and terrible vengeance was taken upon the disaffected city." - Hastings

Sources of Gail (used in 1930)

- 1 - ~~unemployment~~
- 2 - ~~slavery~~
- 3 - ~~crime~~
- 4 - ~~political corruption~~
- 5 - ~~religious injustice~~
- 6 - ~~industrial strife~~
- 7 - ~~greed~~

Demagogic frailty (1930)

Function of Religion

A. Human attention

B. Give us truth

C. Lead us to a satisfactory solution.

An appeal to faithfulness and not be fooled by mountain shadows.

"Old Testament History"
Part 1

Abimelech

"Gideon's son by a Canaanite woman of Shechem, and upon the death of his father, aided by his maternal relatives and hired mercenaries, he murdered seventy of his half-brothers - all except Jotham - and was made king of Shechem."

The story of his reign, which locates the mark of antiquity, is one of rivalry, dissension, and bloodshed.

It represents the first real attempt at kingship in Israel.

Did at the siege of Shechem by the hand of a woman Jotham's parallel of the text ^{parable} ~~text~~ gives his view of his brother's character and origin and forecasts his end.

Paul's Call To Rebellion (9:16-24)
30-33
34-37

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"Very distinctly Bible attributes the distant movements of men to God's imagination."

Nothing is known of "Paul the son of Eliel."

"The record of Elisha the judge induces in lofty and secure dignity against the fading and tattered fragments of the story of the bramble bush who would be king."

The Interpreter's Bible

The story of Abimelech (9:1-57)

Perhaps the most instructive allegory in Judges answers the question as to how Shechem became an Israelite city. Elisha rejected the idea of kingship, possibly because it was a Canaanite idea - Abimelech, being half Canaanite, could do.

Jotham's Fable.

"There taking refuge in the shade of the bramble which boasts a protection it is powerless to give - is the height of absurdity. On the other hand the woodless bramble may harbor a fire which can sweep to destruction over the mighty cedars of Lebanon."

The fact that the useful trees could not abandon their important function is evidence of the insignificance of kingship as the thinking of Shechem at the time. "The words of the beech, Trust in my shadow, seek refuge there, contained a deep irony, the truth of which the Shechemites were very soon to discover."

see Ps 121:8
63:7
91:1

"To keep the evil spirit out of human attitudes and relationships requires the introduction of a benevolent spirit."

"The confusion and tension which surrounded Abimelech's grasp of power were inevitable, in view of the promising and assumptions on which it rested, that the author of Judges ... regarded the evil spirit as really God. ... the chapter moves to its tragic conclusion with the inevitability of a Greek drama."

"The paradox is that our moral depression has come in the midst of better economic conditions than have been known for many years or perhaps has never been known anywhere. If economic factors were really the determining factors, as some philosophers hold, this could not be true, but it is." - Oswald Love "The Gift of Kings"

The Expositor's Bible

Pilgrimage value of the story - "it shows the disastrous result of a coalition with idolatry ... it illustrates the danger of co-partnership with the worldly on worldly terms."

God was no better than Abimelech

"Let us not think that religion can take care of itself. Elisha did good service in his day, yet failing in faithfulness he left the matter scarcely more earnest, his own family scarcely instructed."

References

"The Life We Preach" - Ben J. Swallow
Interpreter Bible
Red Testament Study Party
The Epistle to the Galatians
Introduction to the C. T. - Macdonald
- P. H. H. P.
"Christ and Moral Dilemma" - Buttrick
"The Gift of Power" - L. J. Sherrill

1. Morality =

2. Unselfishness =

✓ 3. Work =

1. The notion that life consists of the things we possess.

2. The idea that the finest rewards of life come without effort.

3. The idea that righteousness is relative.

Buttrick says:

"There is a light from a glorious, pardon for our sins, life from mortality."

"You are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His name."

The insight of the Book of Judges is that the answer to Israel's problem is to turn to God. But he alone can bring them freedom. The real problem was not Abimelech - the real problem was Baal.

What Shall We Do?

1. "We must let a life lived in response to Christ's love be index to our wants."
- Buttrick

2. "We must have faith in faith, so that which transforms life - not faith in works which will bring one into favor with God and man." - Sherrill
We must seek for something more than an easy way out of our present problem.

3. We must accept this basic fact that there are no bargains. Even omnipotent God could save us only by means of a Cross.
These are "bargain days."

Mountain Shadows

"And when Baal saw the men he said to Gabel, Look men are coming down from the mountain tops! And Gabel said to him, You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men."

Judges 9:36 (RSV)

I. Introduction

- A. As order to remember
1. Things on a finger-ring on the other hand.
 2. Magnific bulletins boards, peg boards, Tabernacles
 3. Symbols for traffic safety
- B. Our country puts up monuments
1. An old custom
 2. Joshua 4:6 - "When your children ask in time to come what do those stones mean to you? Then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off by Gabel's ark... so these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."

C. Today I want to give you a symbol to help you remember something important

1. I have often sat by the lake and looked at the shadows on the mountains
2. They are an important symbol

The basis of this symbol comes from an old, old story in the 9th chapter of the Book of Judges. I know people who like to watch Westerns. I want to tell you the Old Testament has some stories that make modern Westerns seem tame.

A. This story concerns three people - Abimelech, Gabel, and Gabel.

B. Abimelech was Gabel's son.

1. Tried to become king
 2. Killed his men and murdered all but one of his brothers - 70 of them!
 3. The city of Shechem, a Canaanite city, declared him king.
- The real value of the story was to show the disastrous result of a union of the Israelites with idolatry.

Within this story are several other stories

- a. You should read the Bible story of the tree
- b. I am interested in a story telling how a man named Baal tried to rebel against Abimelech.

C. The story of Gabel

1. Really no better than Abimelech so I cannot present him as a hero
 2. We learn little or nothing about him beyond this story - he was just another greedy man who wanted to get power for himself.
 3. He worked in the classic manner. He used the discontent of Shechem to start a rebellion. The men of Shechem put confidence in him.
 4. The ruler of the city - Gabel warned Abimelech and gave him a plan.
 5. One morning Gabel stood at the gate of the city.
- Abimelech's forces started to move in. This is what we need.

"And when Baal saw the men, he said to Gabel, Look men are coming down from the mountain tops! And Gabel said to him, You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men."

Well, they were not shadows. They were real - Abimelech's defeated Gabel.

C. Shadows on the mountain - the symbol of our failure to discover the real danger is our lives.

Jesus once said: "You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Can we tell shadows from men?

Can we distinguish between danger and mere anxiety?

Are we aware, in our lives, from which direction the attack will come?

8/25/57

CALL TO WORSHIP

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his. He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found: call ye upon him while he is near. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.

INVOCATION

"O Lord, open thou our lips and purify our hearts, that we may worthily magnify thy holy name; and help us to be reverent in thought, word, and act, and to worship thee now and always in the faith and spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.

OFFERTORY SENTENCES

They shall not appear before the Lord empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee. Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High.

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:5b - "

Some mistakes ideas -

A. The notion that life consists in the things we possess

B. The idea that the finest rewards of life come without effort. That you can get something for nothing.

C. That the only preparation necessary for life is an education, i.e. training

II. I am saying today that

A. The great tests in your life will come, not at the point of your business or professional competence - the great tests will come at the point of your personal relations - at the point of your emotions - at the point of your spirit.

B. There are no bargains in life. Omniscient God could save us only by means of a cross.

C. Modern people desperately need something expressed by a very old fashioned word - salvation.

1. We are willing to accept that word with all except in religion

a. We get inoculated to save our health

b. We get insured to protect our property, our money, our car.

2. We need in addition something that will make it possible for us mentally and spiritually to be ready for today

3. And we have it - that is the good news - the Gospel of Christ

When you see the shadows on the mountains, ask yourself

A. Am I aware of the real dangers in my life?

B. Am I aware that I cannot meet these dangers alone?

C. Am I aware that there is a higher for my ignorance, pardon for my sins, power for my weakness

These are writers, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name."

The insight of the Book of Judges is that the answer to Israel's problem is to turn to God. That he alone can bring them freedom. The real problem was not Abimelech - the real problem was Baal.