

Many of you are probably now asking yourselves two questions: who in the world is Jotham, and why should I care what he says. I can answer one of those questions in a timely manner. You should care because this parable, though it comes from the Old Testament, is equally as important as the other New Testament parables, some of which we have heard today. As for whom Jotham is this will take a bit more time. Jotham was one of the sons of Gideon, and he found himself in a sad state of affairs. The sad state of affairs that I am referring to, like most sad state of affairs, results from politics.

Gideon, the father of Jotham and an Israelite Judge, had just died leaving behind 70 legitimate, and countless illegitimate sons. One of the illegitimate sons, Abimelech, son of a Schechemite concubine, sought to rule as the successor of Gideon. However, unfortunately for Abimelech, there were 70 better options in line ahead of him, but Abimelech was dead set on becoming king, so he appealed to the leaders of Shechem, his mother's homeland, and was given 70 pieces of silver, which he used to purchase a small army of thugs and reprobates. With his new men in tow, Abimelech traveled to the home of his late father, where he systematically executed almost all 70 of his brothers. All except for Jotham, who had hid during the massacre. After his work Abimelech was crowned king of the Israelites at "the oak of the pillar at Shechem." The news was told to Jotham, and upon hearing it, Jotham gave his parable of the trees.

At first glance, the parable of the trees seems to have been pulled right from the pages of a political science essay written by a teenager who has just read the Communist Manifesto for the first time. "Down with the society," "Fight the man," "All the government wants is to let the fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon." Normal angsty high-school stuff. However, as with all things biblical, one should dig deeper, and not base their faith off of first glances.

In that spirit, let us dig deeper into this parable, and find out what Jotham really means. Jotham is not saying that there should be no leaders or government. He himself was the son of a Judge, the de-facto leader of the Jewish people. Jotham saying that there should be no government, would be equivalent to the Clerk of the Cession suggesting that we get rid of Robert's Rules of order during church meetings. What Jotham is saying is that we need to be careful with whom we chose to lead us.

The fear that Jotham outlines is that we chose as our leader someone that seeks only to serve their own self interest. The concept of choosing the right leader, quite naturally, appears everywhere. Literature has its own trope surrounding choosing a leader. This trope is of course: that the best king is the one that does not want to be king. We see this is played out in Prince Caspian written by the most prominent figure of the Christian faith, C.S. Lewis. At the end of Prince Caspian Aslan asks the titular hero whether he thinks himself, "sufficient to take up the Kingship of Narnia," Caspian responds that he does not to which Aslan replies "Good, if you had felt yourself sufficient, it would have been proof that you were not." Now while poetic, the way in which Aslan crowns Caspian does not translate well into real life.

In real life, the literary embodiment of Jesus will not be deciding our rulers for us. We must instead, pray for guidance when we chose who is to lead us. We must ask God to help us pick leaders who have the interests of God at heart. Additionally, real life presents a problem for those that seek power. Last time I checked there was not a giant lion walking around the streets of D.C., bursting into office buildings and dragging unwitting accountants into a life of politics. No, real life is much harder.

In real life you will not be dragged by a giant lion, instead, you will be called by a soft voice in your heart. If you believe that you have been called to seek a position of power, whether it be president of the homeowners association, or President of the United States ask God to help you search within yourself and determine whether or not you are seeking the position of power because you truly wish to help, or because you want more money, or respect.

In both situations, whether choosing a leader, or determining if you, yourself are chosen to be a leader, we have to look no further than Jesus Christ to find an example of the ideal leader. Jesus is the true servant leader. Powerful enough to resist the devil in the wilderness, humble enough to clean the feet of his disciples, and loving enough to die for humanity. If we follow a leader who tries to walk in the path of Jesus we can do no wrong.

On the other side of the coin. If we follow a leader like Abimelech, one who is only interested in themselves, and their own power. All that awaits us is the fate that awaited the Israelites all those centuries ago: fire and blood.