

THE FOLLY OF GOOD INTENTIONS

Joshua 22

We all have good intentions...but the key to living the *abundant* and *victorious* Christian life is to *obey* God...not *justify* our good intentions. I.e. *God knows my heart!* Good intentions are the *curse* of the victorious Christian life. Good intentions became the curse for the tribes of **Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh.**

A rash and impetuous decision made by the 2 ½ tribes settling *east* of the Jordan threatened to bring the newly settled nation into a disastrous and divisive civil war. But in God's providence, the tragedy was averted and an important lesson learned.

I. THE CHARGE FROM JOSHUA: (vs. 2-4, 6-9)

Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had performed well. They had kept their word to **God, Moses, and Joshua** (**Numbers 32; Joshua 1:16-18; Joshua 4:12-14**). They had fought alongside their brothers in all the struggles of the conquest of **Canaan**. For *seven* (7) long years these men were separated from their wives and families...but now *the battles were over, the land was divided*, and it was *time to go home*. So **Joshua** dismissed them with blessing (vs. 6-7).

So when **Joshua** sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, and said to them, "Return to your tents with great riches and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, iron, and with very many clothes; divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers" (vs. 7b-8)...**Joshua** gave them instructions to share the plunder with their brothers who had remained at home (only about 1/3 of the men from the 2 ½ tribes fought with the rest of **Israel** in the conquest in **Canaan**, while 2/3 stayed and supported the families...**Joshua 4:13; Numbers 26:7, 18, 34**). Extensive wealth had been acquired by the soldiers and was to be divided and shared with everyone.

II. THE CAUTION FROM JOSHUA: (vs. 5)

Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which **Moses** the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul (vs. 5)...

Their *military obligations* were fulfilled but **Joshua** reminded them of their abiding *spiritual commitment* which was the condition for God's continued blessing.

Like an anxious parent who sees a son or daughter leave home for a place where the young person could be separated from Spiritual influences...**Joshua** delivered an earnest charge to the departing men. He was perhaps fearful that their separation from the rest of the tribes might cause them to drift away from worshiping the Lord, and to embrace idolatry.

Five (5) things that were to never change in the lives of the Israelites (vs. 5): *The same priorities of the faith we must have...*

- **OBEY GOD**...They must never change their commitment and faithfulness to the Word of God. **Keep (observe) His commandments and the Law.**
- **LOVE GOD**...They must never change or lose their devotion and dedication to God. They were to never lose their worship. **Love the Lord your God.**
- **FOLLOW GOD**...They must never change their walk with God. **Walk in all His ways.**
- **FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD**...They must never change their appreciation for the sovereign will of God. **Hold fast to Him.**
- **SERVE GOD**...They must never change their work for God. **Serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.**

III. THE CONCERN OF THE ISRAELITES: (vs. 10-20)

As the 2 ½ tribes approached the **Jordan**, a sense of isolation began to sweep over them. It became very noticeable that a very pronounced boundary of separation existed between the tribes. There was more than just the **Jordan** that would separate them from the western tribes. There were mountains on each side of the river along with the **Jordan Valley** that was nestled in between. This created a fear that the tribes on each side of the **Jordan** could permanently drift apart. *Out of sight...out of mind.*

So the 2 ½ tribes *unwisely*, but with good intentions, built an **altar** on the west side of the **Jordan** before crossing over to settle and inhabit their allotted land (vs. 10). It was to serve as a **witness** that they too shared in the inheritance of the Lord. Notice...their focus

was *horizontal* instead of *vertical*. They were more concerned and focused on themselves and their rights and what they might lose, than God.

And it was a needless act. God had already ordained that all the males should appear at the **Tabernacle** (Temple) *three times each year* (**Exodus 23:14-17**) in order to preserve the unity of the tribes.

“Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me...Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God.”

~Exodus 23:14, 17

- **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (As part of the **Passover**)... Celebrated God’s deliverance from slavery in **Egypt** and symbolized the haste with which **Israel** left **Egypt** (**7 days**).
- **Feast of Harvest** (**Feast of Pentecost**...the **Feast of Weeks**...the **Feast of the First Fruits**)...Expressed thanksgiving for the grain harvest and crops, and the dedication of the first portion of the crops.
- **Feast of Ingathering** (**Feast of Booths**...**Feast of Tabernacles**)... Commemorated the years of wandering in the wilderness and God’s provision throughout the wandering.

What was wrong with building an **altar** to God? The **altar** was the place *sacrifices* were offered. An **altar** was never given as a **witness** or *symbol*. In **Exodus** and again in **Leviticus**, God made it very clear that *three times a year* every male was to go before the **altar of God**...*not man’s altar*. The **altar** was part of the **Tabernacle** or **Temple**...it never stood alone. It was first put at **Gilgal**...now it’s at **Shiloh**. This is the **altar** that would eventually be in **Jerusalem**. This was the only **altar** allowed for *sacrifices*.

When the sons of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh to go up against them in war (**vs. 12**)...The symbol of *unity* was construed by the other tribes to be a symbol of *apostasy*...*rebellion*. When word reached **Shiloh**, the site of the *one true altar*, the sons of Israel gathered to go up against the *eastern tribes* in war.

Instead of a rush to judgment though, a decision was made to send **Phinehas**, the son of **Eleazar the priest**, and **ten chiefs**, one chief for each of the **ten tribes of Israel**, to confront them (**vs. 16-20**).

Arriving at the **altar**, the appointed group charged the **2 ½ tribes** with **turning away from following the Lord** (**vs. 16, 18**) and **rebelling against Him** (**vs. 16, 18-19**). They reminded them of previous unfaithful acts that brought God’s judgment on the whole nation.

Unfaithful acts of the Israelites:

- **The iniquity of Peor** (**Numbers 25**). Israel worshiped the **Baal of Peor**.
- **The unfaithfulness of Achan** (**Joshua 7**).

Phinehas and the **ten chiefs** did a remarkable job of defusing a potentially volatile situation. They listened to the **2 ½ tribes** and understood that they weren’t in rebellion. But what they should have done was *rebuke* them and have them *tear down* the newly built **altar**.

The group finally suggested that if the land east of the **Jordan** was *defiled* and *unclean* that they would make room for them on the west side of the **Jordan** and the **2 ½ tribes** could come and take possession among them (**vs. 19**).

IV. THE COMMITMENT OF THE 2 ½ TRIBES: (vs. 21-34)

In response, they *sincerely justified* their good intentions by saying that God knew their **heart**. They even invoked God as their witness by swearing *twice* by His *three names* (**El, Elohim, and Yahweh**) (**vs. 22**).

So why did they build it?

But truly we have done this out of concern, for a reason, saying, “In time to come your sons may say to our sons, ‘What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel?’” (**vs. 24**)...

They also stated that they were fully aware of God’s laws governing **Israel’s** worship.

Therefore we said, “Let us build an altar, **not** for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it shall be a **witness** between us and you and between our generations after us, that are to perform the service of the Lord before Him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings, that your sons may not say to our sons, in time to come, ‘You have no portion in the Lord’.” (**vs. 26-27**)...

Again...an **altar** was always purposed as an **altar** for **sacrifices**... never as a **witness** or **symbol**.

The *intention* was right, but the *method* was wrong. The *motive* was right, but the *method* missed the mark. As a result, the *message* was then compromised. Don't ever compromise the *message* (vs. 28).

An example of the *right motive*, but the *wrong method*...the ark (Exodus 25 verse II Samuel 6).

“They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them.”

~Exodus 25:10-14

“They placed the ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it from the house of Abinadab which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart. So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Ahio was walking ahead of the ark...But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.

~II Samuel 6:3-4, 6-7

Therefore we said, “It shall also come about if they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, then we shall say, ‘See the copy of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it is a witness between us and you’.” (vs. 28)...*Right motive...wrong method*.

The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar Witness; “For,” they said, “it is a witness between us that the Lord is God.” (vs. 34)...They did it *man's way*, then they sought God's blessing.

V. THE CURSE RESULTING TO THE ISRAELITES:

The building of another **altar** set a dangerous precedent. What was intended to be a *unifying factor*, ultimately became a *dividing factor*. The unifying factor for **Israel** was her *worship*.

Later, when the central sanctuary was abandoned as the true place of worship, the tribes began to develop *independent sanctuaries*, thus alienating themselves from the other tribes and weakening their unity and ultimate their protection...it weakened their military potential.

In **I Chronicles 5** you find that the tribes of **Reuben**, **Gad**, and **Manasseh** were the first tribes to move into *idolatry*. Ultimately, they were the first tribes to be carried into *captivity* by the **Assyrian** armies.

“But they acted treacherously against the God of their fathers and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara and to the river of Gozan, to this day.”

~I Chronicles 5:25-26

What began with choosing a land that was appealing to the eye... they desired land on the east side of the **Jordan**...continued when they decided to build an **altar** for a reason other than *sacrifice*. They then entered into *idolatry*. And it ended in *exile* and *bondage*. The *curse of disobedience*...the *curse of good intentions*.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- You can be SINCERE and have GOOD INTENTIONS and still MISS God. You can be sincerely wrong.
- OBEDIENCE is a priority to experiencing God...not being religious or engaging in religious activities.

“...To obey is better than sacrifice.”

~I Samuel 15:22

- When we miss God...REPENT. God forgives and restores.