

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

May 24, 2020

- I. Review from last week's first half of the story
 - A. Over the past two Sundays, we have looked at the story of Israel voting 10-2 against going into the Promised Land – a Land given to them as a gift by God, and a Land they would have been enabled to possess by the power, provision, protection, and wisdom of God. And yet, they allowed fear, despair, and the assumption that only doom awaited them to get in the way of trusting and obeying God.
 1. We ended last Sunday with **Hebrews 3:12-14**, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an **evil, unbelieving** heart that falls away from the living God. [13] But **encourage one another** day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”
 2. As you may recall, I emphasized the words, “**encourage one another day after day**,” in order to encourage us to work together as a church against distrust of God and an unbelieving heart. To begin our teaching today, I want to say a few words about the word “**encourage**” found at the beginning of **vs 13**.
 3. This word “encourage” is important because, as with the Israelites, so with us – fear, discouragement or despair, and projecting doom are three powerful enemies of faith in God and obedience to God. If left unchallenged, these three enemies can eat away at the strongest faith until unbelief and disobedience come to the surface.
 4. Therefore, to combat unbelief, many of us need to be encouraged to keep trusting God, to continue patiently waiting for God to act in ways we can see, and to remain godly in spite of the difficult person or circumstances we are facing.
 - B. The fact is, it takes a fairly strong faith to continue trusting God, think well of Him, maintain a good attitude, and keep our behavior godly when facing particularly difficult, painful, or seemingly never ending trials and tribulation. Therefore, most of us need encouragement, and that kind of encouragement is to come from one another – which is why God says we are to work together to encourage one another day after day so that we don't fall back into unbelief and disobedience.
 - C. Pray

II. Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land

A. Today, we are going to look at Israel's final preparations for going into the Promised Land. Forty years have elapsed between our last story – which was about Israel's vote against going into the Promised Land and the story we are going to look at today. We begin today's story in **Numbers 33:50** . . . Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho (*The Israelites were coming into the Promised Land from the east.*), saying, [51] "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, [52] then you shall **drive out all** the inhabitants of the land from before you, and **destroy all** their figured stones, and **destroy all** their molten images and **demolish all** their high places; [53] and you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it.

1. In other words, Israel was to drive out the sinful people and destroy and demolish their religious supports for their evil ways. And as they drove out the sinful people (*city by city, and tribe by tribe*) and destroyed and demolished everything related to their religious beliefs and practices, they were to possess the land by settling in and living in it – thus replacing the old sinful people and their evil ways with a new people and godly ways.
2. In a similar way, when we repent and trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, we are to begin the process of driving out our fleshly ways that support our old sinful ways, and we are to turn away from and reject the influences of the cultural supports for our old sinful ways, and we are to fill in those empty spaces with a new, godly way of thinking and behaving so that we become a new creation in Christ Jesus.

B. [54] 'You shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to the larger you shall give more inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give less inheritance. Wherever the lot falls to anyone, that shall be his. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.

1. We see in these instructions the supreme authority of God and the supreme fairness of God.
2. You see, Israel was a tribal society – made up of twelve tribes who were to peacefully live together in one homeland. And they able to do this because God was their King, and as the supreme authority, He exercised His authority according to righteousness, justice, love, kindness, and mercy.

3. The important point here is that with God as their King, there was not advantage for fighting among the tribes to see who could be more powerful in order to have an advantage over the other tribes. There was no advantage to playing politics, for God played fair regardless of any political intrigue. And there was no means for a few to get rich while many, or even the majority lived with much less or in poverty, because God owned the land. Therefore, the portion given to you and your family would always belong to you.
 4. Sadly, as a nation and as a world who have basically rejected God, we lack the kind of leadership God gave Israel, and it shows in our politics, civil wars, cruel dictatorships, terrorism, the gap between the rich and the poor, and widespread, universal poverty.
- C. [55] But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain, [they] will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you (*that is, lead you astray from God's way*) in the land in which you live. [56] And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.
1. There is a principle here that is as absolute as the law of gravity. Paul stated this principle with just a few words in **1 Corinthians 15:33**, “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.”
 2. The principle is this – you cannot leave known sin in your life, no matter how minor, and you cannot open yourself to the ungodly influence of people or the ungodly practices of the world without that sin and those ungodly influences **progressively producing** sinful desires, sinful thinking, sinful speaking, and sinful behavior in you.
 3. You see, sin is like cancer, and like cancer, sin continues to progressively grow and spread. And it is for this reason that sin cannot be contained. You may be able to hide it for a time, or slow its growth and minimize its spread, but to prevent it from growing and spreading, you must remove it or destroy it.
 4. This is why Paul writes in **Colossians 3:5-8**, “Therefore, put to death the members of your body which are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. [6] For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, [7] and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. [8] But now you also, put these all [away] (*that is, drive them out of your life*): anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”

5. And then, as if to address the “possess and live in” part of taking the Christian life and growing in godliness, Paul continues on in **Colossians 3:12-14**, “And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. [14] Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”
 6. Let me summarize two points from this –
 - a. **First**, if you allow any amount of sin to remain in your life, it will grow and spread, and in time it will bring unneeded and unnecessary problems into your life and the lives of those around you. Then God will chastise or even punish you just as He does anyone who goes on knowingly and willfully sinning.
 - b. **Second**, driving sin out or killing it off is only half of what needs to be done to possess the Christian life. As we drive sin out, we must replace that space with Christ-likeness. In other words, just as the Israelites were to drive the evil people out of the Promised Land – **AND AS THEY DID**, dwell in it, so we are to put off sin and kill off our old nature – **AND AS WE DO**, put on godliness, holiness, and love.
- D. To continue this story, we are going to leave **Numbers** and move to **Joshua** where we pick up the story of Israel’s final preparations for entering and possessing the Promised Land.
1. And so we read in **Joshua 1:1** . . . Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, [2] "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which **I am giving to**...the sons of Israel.
 - a. Notice, this Land, like salvation, was a gift from God which could only be received by trusting God enough to enter into it and possess it according to the directions given by God.
 - b. And as the scripture says, they could only possess the Land as they drove out the sinful inhabitants and destroyed the things that promoted and fed evil in the Land. The same is true for us in living the Christian life.
 2. [3] Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. [4] From the wilderness and this [part of] Lebanon, even as far as the great river Euphrates, all the

land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. [5] **No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life.** Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.”

- a. These words, “**No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life**” were a guaranteed promise to Joshua and the Israelites. And to His praise and glory, God makes this same kind of promise to you regarding entering and possessing the Christ-like life.
- b. And though growing in godliness and being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ is a daily battle, and though that daily battle can seem exceedingly wearisome at times, God promises there is no one, and there is nothing that can prevent progressive victories until the work is completed.
- c. Now let me be clear, we can lose God’s protection by knowingly and intentionally sinning, just like Achan did in taking what was forbidden to take from Jericho. And when we act like Achan, there will be destructive consequences just like there were consequences in Israel’s next battle against Ai. However, like with Israel, so with us. We can repent, make the wrongs right, and return to living for God by doing what we know is right.

E. [6] **“Be strong and courageous,** for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. [7] **Only be strong and very courageous;** be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.

1. There are three important truths in these two verses. Two of them come from the repeated phrase, “be strong and courageous.”
2. **First**, when we are strong and courageous in trusting God so as to do His will and live according to His word, our faith and subsequent faithful living **can be used by God** to help others to trust Him and live a godly life of faith.
3. **Second**, we need to be strong and courageous if we are going to carefully and thoughtfully live according to the will and word of God. Putting to death our old nature and growing in godliness cannot be accomplished by the weak and timid, or by those ruled by fear and indecision. You have to be willing to put on the full armor

of God and go out and fight with the confidence that even if it appears you are going to lose, you won't.

4. **Third**, in order to be a success in fulfilling God's will and being part of accomplishing His purposes in our world, you must carefully do what God says to do and what you know is right – and you must be careful not do what God says not to do and what you know is wrong. It is true, self-discipline and hard work are important. A clear goal and a wise plan are important. Education and experience are very helpful. Bible study and prayer are vital. Yet for these to make you successful, they must be held up and held together by godliness.
 - a. Remove godliness and you may become successful by the world's standards, but you will not be a success by God's standards.
 - b. Paul affirms this in **2 Timothy 2:20-21**, "Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things (*the things that are ungodly and therefore soil you*), he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

- F. [8]"This book of the law shall **not depart from your mouth** (*in other words, it shall be on your mind at all times – and for this to happen you need to memorize it so you can bring it to mind and ponder it anytime, anywhere – and especially when being tempted to depart from what God's word says*) but you shall **meditate on it day and night** (*in other words, as often as possible*), so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; **for then** (*when God's word is on our mind at all times and we are pondering it as often as possible*) you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (*because you are acting wisely—which is equal to acting according to the word of God*)."
 1. Notice the two "all the time" type statements God makes in this verses: (1) God's word shall not depart from your mouth, and (2) meditate on God's word day and night. Now I understand that life is busy and there are many demands on our time. And I know that there are those who have more so-called free time than others.
 2. So let's not make this about time, but rather about values. What is it that you value? And to answer that question honestly, you must examine your choices and behavior, because they are the best indicator of what you value. Once you have done that, you are ready

- to decide if what your behavior shows you value is what you really want or know you ought to value as a Christian.
3. According to God's words to Joshua – who would have been very busy as God's leader of Israel – he was to value knowing God's word well enough that it would be on his mind. And he was to value pondering it often enough to gain the insight and wisdom necessary to apply it to his personal life and leadership position in the most practical and God-honoring ways possible.
 4. And this is valuable because godliness is the path of life, whereas ungodliness – in any amount or to any degree – veers us off the path of life into situations and ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving that lead to destruction, loss, and death.
 - a. Jesus said it this way in **John 10:10**, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; [but] I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."
 - b. And though the devil may only steal a little at first, or only start the process of dying, or destroy such a small amount that it is hardly noticeable, he will not stop until he has stolen it all, killed everything, and destroyed more than can be restored.
 5. The point is that knowing and pondering God's word is extremely valuable. And if we will value what is truly valuable in spite of the time we have or don't have, we will use the time we have to study God's word and ponder how we can apply it to our lives.

III. Conclusion

- A. [9] "Have I not commanded you (*Am I not the One who has told you what to do?*)? [Therefore] be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your **God is with you** wherever you go."
- B. We sing these words: "In heavenly armor we'll enter the land. The battle belongs to the Lord. No weapon that's fashioned against us will stand. The battle belongs to the Lord! When the enemy presses in hard do not fear. The battle belongs to the Lord!"
- C. The truth is, neither Joshua, nor the Israelites, nor you, nor me – none of us will be successful in living according to God's will and word **solely** because we know it and ponder it. We will be successful in living a godly life and serving those around us because **God is with us**. You see, it is God who protects, empowers, helps, and enables us live according to His will and word as we, like Israel possessing the Promised Land, get up each day, put on the armor of God, and go out to do battle with our flesh and the world until victory is won.