

The Imposing Altar – Joshua 22:7-20

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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I. INTRODUCTION

Matthew 7:1-5

1 "Judge not, that you be not judged.

Has anyone ever quoted those words of Jesus to you? Or have you ever used them on others? Usually when these words are quoted, they're being used to either deflect someone's attempt to confront us on a sin issue, or to excuse ourselves from having to confront another brother or sister in Christ about an area where they've gone off track. And, of course, those who don't believe in Christ also love to quote this verse to us whenever we're discussing God's moral standards of right and wrong. John 3:16 is widely recognized as the most well-known verse in the Bible, but I'm sure that this verse from Matthew 7:1 is a very close second, wouldn't you say?

But does this verse really mean we can't make a judgment about what's right and wrong or confront a sin issue in another believer's life? Absolutely not. God clearly directs us in his Word to call sin, sin, and to love our brothers in Christ enough to confront them in love, with humility, when they're caught up in it; and to allow others to do the same to us when we're off track. Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5, verses 9 to 13:

9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside.

Clearly, we are to make judgments among believers in Christ about what's right and wrong and be willing to confront each other in love when any of us are caught in sin's trap. But the key to this process is that we do it in love and with the goal restoration, not condemnation; and that we go to the source and truly understand the facts of what's going on before we rush to pre-judgment of other people's motives and actions. Have you ever done that? I would argue that we tend to do that so often and so naturally, that we hardly even realize we're doing it and how damaging it is to our relationships.

Jesus also said, in John 7:24:

24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

As we return to Joshua today, we're going to see how pre-judging people by appearances and by hearsay can lead to great misunderstanding and even blow up into an all-out war if we're not careful. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Joshua chapter 22, where we'll be studying verses 7 through 20 today.

For those of you who weren't here last week, and to briefly remind us all where we left off: Joshua has just finished commending the people of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh for keeping their promises to fight with their brothers to take the full extent of the Promised Land, even though their land on the east side of the Jordan River had already been conquered and was ready for them to start making their own. And as Joshua released them to return to their own land in the east with his blessing, he shared with them the one thing they needed to know to do well in their land and walk in connected relationship with their God. I called it the 5-fold rhythm of life with God, which still accurately describes how we live connected with God through Christ as his servant today:

- 1) Cultivating our love relationship with God, which is the basis and foundation and lifeblood of everything else;
- 2) Walking through life with him and in him and learning how to live life like him;
- 3) Following his guidance and actually putting his Word into practice;
- 4) Clinging to him and trusting in his wisdom and power for all things;
- 5) Serving him with all that we have – the focus of our lives becoming simply this: being his servant in all that we do.

II. RETURNING HOME BLESSED TO SHARE THE BLESSING (Vs. 7 to 9)

Well, after sharing this most important advice with Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, Joshua sent them away and blessed them. And this is where we pick up today in verses 7 through 9, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Returning Home Blessed to Share the Blessing*. Let's read verses 7 through 9 to begin:

7 Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their brothers in the land west of the Jordan. And when Joshua sent them away to their homes and blessed them, 8 he said to them, "Go back to your tents with much wealth and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and with much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers." 9 So the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home, parting from the people of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, their own land of which they had possessed themselves by command of the Lord through Moses.

Well, in these first 3 verses, notice God's generous blessing and reward to these 2 ½ tribes for their faithfulness to him and their brothers. They were returning to their own land with great wealth they had taken from the enemies God had conquered before them – large herds of livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron and a great quantity of clothing. God generously allowed them to keep the spoils of war for themselves, but as they returned to their land Joshua instructed them to generously share it among themselves. The spoil was to be divided among them all rather than hoarded by a few, leaving others with little or nothing. As God had been generous with them they were to be generous with each other. God's people were to be different from the world around them, sharing what God had blessed them with, so that everyone's needs would be provided for and everyone would enjoy a portion of God's blessing.

So with these final instructions from Joshua, the 2 ½ tribes left Shiloh and began their journey back to their own land, the land of Gilead, on the other side of the Jordan River.

III. BUILDING A MISUNDERSTOOD ALTAR (Vs. 10 to 12)

Now as they journeyed back to their land, there must have been some good discussions on the way, because as they neared the Jordan River, the 2 ½ tribes decided to do something BIG, literally, before they crossed into their own land. Let's see what that was in our next section, verses 10 through 12:

10 And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. 11 And the people of Israel heard it said, "Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel." 12 And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them.

Have you ever heard of an ROUS? Those of you who've seen the movie, *The Princess Bride*, should know what an ROUS is...*a rodent of unusual size*. Well, our 2 ½ tribes decided to build what we could call an AOUS...*an altar of unusual size*! Just a little humor to make sure you're still with me! For reasons not yet revealed in our passage, there on western edge of the Jordan River, before crossing to their own land in the east, they decided to build a very large altar modeled after the altar that was at the tabernacle and would later be in the temple. And have you ever noticed how large the altar in the temple was? I just came across it the other day as I was reading 2 Chronicles. It was 30 feet long by 30 feet wide by 15 feet high! That's pretty substantial, isn't it? So even if they just built it to the same size as the temple altar, it would have been very noticeable out on the Jordan plain.

Well, people will talk, won't they? This altar of unusual size being constructed near the western edge of the Jordan River was soon creating quite a stir. So much of one, in fact, that the other 9 ½ tribes soon heard the gossip going around. And notice the two negative pre-judgments people were making and spreading around about this construction project: 1) They were saying that the 2 ½ tribes had built **THE** altar; in other words, people had made a judgment that this altar was intended to replace the one approved altar God had commanded to be located at the tabernacle; 2) It was being pointed out that the 2 ½ tribes had also

built this unauthorized altar on land that didn't belong to them! Do you pick up on the malicious nature of this gossip being spread around? And all of it just based on appearances...what it looked like was happening without going to the source to determine the facts and real motives.

Have you ever been the victim of this kind of scenario, or been the one jumping to conclusions without going to the source? Assuming we know real motives before actually going to the source to get the real story and make sure we know the facts. I'd say we've all been on both sides many times in our lives. And as often happens in these situations – sadly both inside and outside the church – all-out, destructive and deadly war was about to be the end result. We read in verse 12, that upon hearing the claims of this malicious gossip ***the whole assembly of the people of Israel*** gathered together at Shiloh ***to make war*** against the 2 ½ tribes.

At the same place where so recently the 2 ½ tribes had been sent off with a commendation and a blessing and with God's guidance for life, deadly war against those same people was about to break out. That's how quickly the tide can turn when malicious gossip spreads its damaging effects!

IV. SENDING ELEVEN WITH PRE-JUDGMENT TO CONFRONT (Vs. 13 to 20)

Well, fortunately in this case, before the whole nation rushed off to war, a group of eleven men were sent to confront the 2 ½ tribes and plead with them to turn away from what was assumed to be their great sin. Let's read verses 13 to 20, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Sending Eleven with Pre-Judgment to Confront*. Beginning in verse 13:

13 Then the people of Israel sent to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, 14 and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. 15 And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, 16 "Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, 'What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord by building yourselves an

altar this day in rebellion against the Lord? 17 Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor [Cf.] from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the Lord, 18 that you too must turn away this day from following the Lord? And if you too rebel against the Lord today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. 19 But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the Lord's land where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the Lord or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the Lord our God. 20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity."

Well, we see here that as these 11 men – Phineas, the son of the Eleazar the head priest, and one representative from each of the 9 ½ tribes – as they passed by the imposing altar, crossed over the Jordan, and finally met up with the 2 ½ tribes in their homeland, they didn't pull any punches. They started right in with a bold statement of all the pre-judgments they had made about the intentions and motives that led to the building of this altar. Apparently, back at Shiloh as the tribes gathered for war, they had together concluded that this new altar was clearly an unfaithful act intentionally committed against God, and now these 11 men were here to boldly pass on that judgment and call the 2 ½ tribes to turn away from their great sin at the risk of complete destruction.

Listen to the 4 confident judgments about motives and intentions that these 11 men spouted out as if they were established facts, with no effort to verify them first: 1) The 2 ½ tribes had turned away from following the Lord; 2) They had built themselves an altar to replace God's one approved altar at the tabernacle; 3) They had done this to rebel against the LORD; and 4) What they had done was comparable to the sin at Peor and the sin of Achan. Those are some pretty intense accusations, aren't they? The kind that could really get your dander up, if someone made them to you, even if you were innocent!

Most of you should be familiar already with the sin of Achan, because we studied it recently in Joshua. Having secretly taken valuable items for himself that had been specifically set aside for use in God's tabernacle and temple, he and his family had subjected themselves to God's forewarned judgment. The sin at Peor,

however, you may not be as familiar with. We aren't going to spend a lot of time on it today, but the sin at Peor happened while Moses was still alive, before the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River to begin taking the Promised Land. In the book of Numbers, chapter 25, we find out that the Israelites had allowed the Moabites to lead them into sexual immorality and worship of the false god, Baal of Peor. And as a result of their great sin, the Lord had sent a plague on the Israelites which killed 24,000 people and was only stopped when Phineas – the same Phineas, by the way, in our passage today - out of jealousy for the Lord's name, put to death a man who was bringing a Moabite woman into his tent even while the plague was killing thousands of Israelites.

What Phineas had done was the only thing that stopped the deadly plague and in response the Lord made this statement:

11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. 12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, 13 and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'"

So Phineas, who was mostly likely doing the talking here with the 2 ½ tribes, knew firsthand how serious it was to rebel against God and intentionally disobey his commands. It's no wonder that he was so boldly and passionately stating the pre-judgments that had been made against the 2 ½ tribes and reminding them of the serious consequences of rebellion in the past and how it had affected the entire nation of Israel and not just those who committed the worst sins. Sin has a compounding effect and even the 9 ½ tribes would be subject to God's judgment if they did nothing to address and resolve sin and rebellion among God's people.

Well finally, after stating the pre-judgments and reminding the 2 ½ tribes of past rebellion consequences, the 11 men made a desperate plea for the 2 ½ tribes to turn away from their sin and even return to the west side of the Jordan and share some of their land if need be. If the land east of the Jordan was polluted and was leading the 2 ½ tribes astray from God, the other tribes would be happy to give up some of their own land to make sure the whole nation was right with God.

It's so interesting, isn't it, how good and godly and wise everything was that Phineas and the other 10 were sharing with the 2 ½ tribes? You can see their passionate desire to resolve the sin issue, to live in accordance with God's commandments, to sacrifice themselves to help their brothers get right with God, and to avoid sinful mistakes that had been made in the past. There's nothing bad or ungodly about anything they shared with the 2 ½ tribes. The primary problem is simply that they rushed to pre-judgment without going to the source to find out what was really going on before gathering for war and dishing out what they thought was God's wisdom for the situation. And the other problem is that as they confronted the situation they came in self-righteous attack mode, rather than coming in humility and allowing the 2 ½ tribes to explain what was going on from their perspective. Instead, in their opening statements it was clear they already judged the 2 ½ tribes. And whenever this happens, it becomes very difficult to have a constructive conversation and work for godly resolution.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Well, this is as far as we're going to get today in Joshua. Next week, Lord willing, we'll complete the rest of chapter 22 and find out how the 2 ½ tribes responded and what happened from here. But as we begin wrapping up, I hope you've seen how applicable this is to our own relationships and the pre-judgments we so naturally and frequently make of other people without going to the source and uncovering the real facts. This is the kind of judging Jesus teaches us never to engage in, and it's something we need the Spirit to open our eyes to and leave behind as part of the destructive ways of our old self.

I want to read Jesus' words about judging again, only this time in context. This is Matthew chapter 7, verses 1 through 5:

1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Do you like it when other people make judgments about you, and share those judgments with others, without coming to you and finding out what's really going on? Jesus tells us that if we don't want people doing that to us, we need to refrain from doing it to them. And did you notice that bit about the log in your own eye that keeps you from seeing clearly to help your brother? Well, what if that log is the pre-judgments you've made about someone before you've humbly gone to the source and understood what's really going on? How effective are you going to be at understanding the issue and providing godly wisdom if you've already decided you know what's going on, but you're wrong?

Phineas and the other 10 men were providing great, godly wisdom that was completely misdirected and completely wrong for the situation. And that's because they had jumped to pre-judgment and confidently arrived to rebuke issues that didn't exist. The log of pre-judgment was in their eyes and they had no idea what was even going on. How much better we would do in our relationships if we consistently refused to pre-judge people based on appearances? And when we do suspect a real issue, if we refused to spread around what we think it is and instead went to the source with humility, a willingness to ask questions and listen. And with a desire not to condemn, but to lovingly turn our brothers and sisters back to godly wisdom when a real sin issue is uncovered?

There's a really helpful principle here that was shared recently with me in my Convergence training. It's called the 10:1 principle. It works like this: Before dispensing your great godly wisdom to someone based on your pre-judgments or your shallow assessment of what's happening, ask 10 questions...10 questions to every 1 word of wisdom from you...10 questions to understand the situation before you provide any kind of solution or advice. How often do you do that with others? And when's the last time someone cared enough to ask you 10 sincere questions and listen carefully to your responses before offering their advice?

This 10:1 principle is also so helpful as we seek to cultivate relationships with people who don't know Christ and share the good news with them. Not only does it show the love and care of Christ when you're willing to ask questions and listen, it also allows you to apply the gospel to real need in their lives. When is the last time someone came up to you and sincerely asked you 10 questions about yourself and how you're doing and was willing to patiently listen to your answers?

I can't think of the last time that's happened to me. Imagine what an impact it would have if we would do that with each other and especially with people who don't know Christ. They will know we are Christians by our love.

Well, we definitely didn't see the 10:1 principle in action as Phineas and his men began the discussion with the 2 ½ tribes, did we? And as we'll find out next week, they were completely off base in their assessment of the situation and the godly wisdom they tried to supply was completely unneeded. They needed to get the log of pre-judgment out of their eyes so they could see clearly how to resolve this situation that was about to escalate to an all-out war.

24 Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

I want to leave you with one last tool that can be of immense practical value in our relationships and in resolving conflicts we encounter. It's from a book called, *The Peacemaker*, by Ken Sande. It's in the library, by the way! Its 4 sequential principles that you should always keep in mind when working to resolve conflict:

- 1) *Glorify God* – go into the situation with your primary directive being to glorify God in everything you say and do;
- 2) *Get the log out of your own eye* – come into the situation with humility and willingness to acknowledge anything you've contributed to the problem - putting aside your pre-judgments and seeking to understand the other person's perspective; Before addressing what you think are the other person's problems, admit your own to them and be ready to listen to their perspective.
- 3) *Gently restore* – humbly present your concern and use the 10:1 principle to make sure you understand the other person's perspective; address the real issue.
- 4) *Go and be reconciled* – work together to address both of your concerns, apologize where needed, forgive each other, and move forward in peace.

This is a godly path to maintaining healthy relationships, diffusing division in the body, and avoiding the all-out war that so can so easily erupt when we offend each other.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE – 4/22/2018
The Imposing Altar – Joshua 22:7-20

Read Joshua 22:7-20, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

Read Matthew 7:1. What does this verse mean in your own words? How have you or other people used this verse at various times during your life?

Read John 7:24. What does this verse mean in your own words? Do you find this verse easy to put into practice? Why or why not?

In Joshua 22:10-12, what were the problems that resulted in a gathering for war? Should the people of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have done anything differently as they constructed this large altar? If so, what?

Do you have any examples of situations in your life where you've pre-judged someone and found out later your judgment was wrong? How about an example of when someone has done that to you?

How do you typically respond when someone comes to confront you and starts with a list of your failings? What would help you respond better to someone confronting you on an issue?

How often do you ask questions of other people in an effort to get to know them? How do you feel when someone cares enough to ask you questions?

Summarize below anything God is calling you personally to believe, any actions God is asking you to take, or any attitudes He wants to change. Repent where needed and enjoy God's mercy. Then pray over these items and make a plan for change by the power of the Spirit.