

Receiving Rebuke – Joshua 22:21-34

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I. INTRODUCTION

The accusations were bold, intense, and condemning. Pre-judgments had been made before any questions had been asked or any facts had been established. The malicious claims of the gossip going around sounded so believable that further research seemed unnecessary. What other conclusions could be reached? Intentional rebellion against God comparable to some of the worst sins in history seemed to be the only explanation and all that remained was to rebuke and confront the offending party and call for repentance. And as 11 men arrived to lay out this judgment and do the rebuking, they began in full attack mode: *What is this unfaithful act you have committed against the God of Israel? You have turned away from him! You have rebelled! You have deliberately disregarded God's commandments! And what you have done is as bad as it gets!*

This is the situation we find ourselves in as we return to Joshua this morning. These accusations against the 2 ½ tribes dwelling east of the Jordan River have been stated in no uncertain terms. The comparisons to the terrible sins of Peor and Achan have been made. And the only way to avoid all-out war...**repentance**... has been called for. The large altar the 2 ½ tribes had built on the western edge of the Jordan River, before crossing over to their land in the east, had created such a stir in the land that the remaining 9 ½ tribes had already gathered together for war. And this was before having any conversation with the altar builders to see what their true motives and intentions were. What remains to be seen today, is how the 2 ½ tribes will respond to the judgments and accusations that have been made and delivered in such a confrontational way.

How do you think you would respond in this situation? Would you be tempted to answer back in attack mode and fan the spark into a forest fire? How well do you handle being rebuked or confronted by another person? What typically happens when your spouse tries to address an issue with you? Sometimes that's the most telling indicator that we may need some work. Can you navigate those waters without a blow-up and an even bigger mess when it's over? It can be especially

hard when we know it's truly an issue we need to work on, but we just don't want to go there. But being **falsely** accused in a confrontational manner can be very difficult to handle as well, and "telling someone off" for their false pre-judgments or questioning of our motives can seem very appealing and "oh so" natural.

Last week we focused on avoiding pre-judgment of people based on gossip and appearances without going to the source to find out what's really going on. We also talked about better ways of approaching a perceived issue with someone, rather than arriving with a full-frontal attack and statement of all the pre-judgments we've already made. But the fact remains, that quite often in life people will not approach us with humility and love and a willingness to ask questions and give us the benefit of the doubt. We can all think of times when we've been pre-judged on appearances and people have arrived to rebuke us in a very harsh and unloving way. Or rather than coming to talk to us about it, they've just started giving us the "cold shoulder" or avoiding us completely. So the question is: *How will we respond in a godly manner in these situations?* Because our response is sometimes the final opportunity to avoid all-out war and maintain unity among God's people.

Additionally, we all need to learn how to be people who can be rebuked without blowing up. Are you a rebukable person? It's not usually fun to be rebuked about something, is it? But if we can't be confronted on an issue, whether it's true or not, without getting defensive and starting a war, we're going to miss out on many growth opportunities and cause a lot of damage both within and outside the body of Christ. Turn with me in your Bibles to Joshua chapter 22, where we'll pick up our study in verse 21 today, and see how the 2 ½ responded to this aggressive confrontation.

II. EXPLAINING THE ALTAR AND REVEALING THE TRUTH (Vs. 21 to 29)

Let's begin by reading verses 21 to 29, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Explaining the Altar and Revealing the Truth*. Beginning in verse 21:

21 Then the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, 22 "The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows;

and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the Lord, do not spare us today 23 for building an altar to turn away from following the Lord. Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, may the Lord himself take vengeance. 24 No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, 'What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? 25 For the Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the Lord.' So your children might make our children cease to worship the Lord. 26 Therefore we said, 'Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, 27 but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the Lord in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, "You have no portion in the Lord."' 28 And we thought, If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we should say, 'Behold, the copy of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you.' 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord and turn away this day from following the Lord by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the Lord our God that stands before his tabernacle!"

May we all learn to respond the way these 2 ½ tribes responded when rebuked, even when the rebuke was unfounded and based on false pre-judgments. I hope you'll really pay attention for a few minutes this morning, because there are some powerful truths here that we really desperately need to absorb and take to heart for our lives today.

As we consider how the 2 ½ tribes handled this situation, we first notice that they patiently listened to the full rebuke and understood the charges against them before responding. It would have been tempting to cut off the rebuke mid-sentence and put a stop to this tirade before it was done and before understanding what it was all about. Instead they patiently listened to the charges against them and then carefully measured their response. They followed the New Testament principle from James: *Be quick to hear; slow to speak; and slow to become angry.*

Secondly, notice that the first words out of their mouths in response expressed their continued belief in and honoring of the One True God who was perfectly capable of handling this situation. **"The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord!..."** Twice they said it. *God's in control here and we'll continue to honor him no matter what.* They didn't start out with, or even ever arrive at, what often comes out of our mouths or is expressed by our tone of voice or expressions: *How dare you question my motives and make these false accusations against me?!* Instead, the 2 ½ tribes were much more concerned about glorifying God and remaining faithful to him as they considered how to respond. When our primary concern becomes ourselves and **our** reputation, instead of God and his glory, we lose the battle and easily start a major war.

Thirdly, the 2 ½ tribes trusted themselves completely into God's hands, knowing that he was well aware of their true motives and would judge justly in this situation. In this attitude of simple trust and security in God's hands, even when other people don't ever come to know the truth of what really happened, there is great peace and the ability to remain calm and continue responding in a godly manner. God will handle the situation and set things right in his timing. This attitude toward and handling of false accusations is most perfectly modeled for us in our Savior, of course. In 1st Peter 2, verses 22 and 23, we read this about Jesus:

22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Learn to trust yourself to him who judges justly, and you will be able to respond to any rebuke or false accusation in a godly manner. And you will be able to continue on in peaceful pursuit of God even when others still falsely suspect you of wrongdoing.

This will also help you in cases where you **are** in the wrong and you **really do need** to be confronted about something. Guess what? God already knows what really happened, whether you admit it to someone else or not. You can't hide it from him and there will be consequences in his timing if you continue in it. You may as well just humbly acknowledge your sin, turn away from it, enjoy his abundant mercy and forgiveness which is guaranteed through Christ, and learn from it as you return to full fellowship with God and his people.

Fourthly, as the 2 ½ tribes responded in this confrontation, they calmly explained their true motives and intentions in building this altar. They stuck around and did their best to explain their perspective and what they were trying to accomplish. They could have walked away in anger or started gathering themselves for war because they were offended by the approach the 9 ½ tribes had taken in addressing this issue. But instead they wanted to reconcile; to continue in relationship with their brothers and sisters and get this worked out for the good of God's people and the glory of God. In God's kingdom, we're never just DONE with someone, because God is never just DONE with us and his intention is that we continue in healthy relationship with him and each other, and in so doing show the world how different we are through the work of Christ in our lives.

Well, the 2 ½ tribes calmly explained that they had built this altar, not to replace the altar at the tabernacle; not to use for burnt offerings or sacrifices; not in any way to rebel against the Lord; but instead to ensure that their children would continue in relationship with the One True God and would not be excluded from worship of him by future generations. This altar was to be a witness that would prove to future generations that even though the 2 ½ tribes lived on the east side of the Jordan, they were still God's people. Their children would be able to point to this copy of the temple altar built by their fathers as evidence that the Lord was their portion as well, and that they also were to participate in burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings at God's temple. Far from being rebellion against the Lord, this altar was intended to express their desire to cling to him and pass on their faith in God to future generations.

Though the 9 ½ tribes had great intentions and a deep desire to remain faithful to God, they had been completely wrong in the pre-judgments they'd made and the godly advice they'd tried to provide. Now it remains to be seen if they'll accept the truth and relent of the war they were threatening.

III. SEEING THE LORD AND RELENTING FROM WAR (Vs. 30 to 34)

Let's find out what happened from here in verses 30 to 34:

30 When Phinehas the priest and the chiefs of the congregation, the heads of the families of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the

people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh spoke, it was good in their eyes. 31 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, "Today we know that the Lord is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the Lord. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the Lord." 32 Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the chiefs, returned from the people of Reuben and the people of Gad in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the people of Israel, and brought back word to them. 33 And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. And the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them to destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled. 34 The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar Witness, "For," they said, "it is a witness between us that the Lord is God."

Well, the godly response of the 2 ½ tribes to the rebuke of the 9 ½, and their explanation of their true intentions in building the altar, were good in the eyes of Phineas and the 10 men with him. When they finally went to the source and found out what was really going on, they discovered the truth, resolved the situation and avoided what could have been deadly war among God's people. And by refusing to respond in anger to the harsh rebuke, but trusting themselves to God who judges justly, the 2 ½ tribes displayed God's glory and power and enjoyed reconciliation and unity with their brothers.

And notice what Phineas concluded from this situation. He said:

"Today we know that the Lord is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the Lord. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the Lord."

The Hebrew word translated, "know," or, "perceive," in some translations, means "to ascertain by seeing." In other words, Phineas saw unmistakable evidence in this situation that the Lord was present with Israel and doing his work among them. The fact that the 2 ½ tribes were not rebelling against the Lord by building this altar, but were seeking to tie themselves and their children forever to him, showed Phineas that the Lord was with them. The godly motives of the 2 ½ tribes

and their godly handling of this confrontation displayed the glory of God and provided evidence that he was among them and doing his work. The same is true when you and I learn to walk in God's ways by the power of his Spirit and respond in godly ways no matter what or who comes our way. People see evidence that God is real and present and working in our lives, because that's just not the way the world without God operates.

Had the 2 ½ tribes really been turning away from the Lord and rebelling against his commands, and had they responded in anger to the rebuke by going to war against the 9 ½ tribes, it would have been evidence to Phineas of the opposite... that there were major problems among God's people and the discipline of the Lord would soon be coming their way. Similarly, when we're living out of step with God's Word, pre-judging people and responding with anger and bitterness when confronted, we're revealing to ourselves and others how desperately we need God's work and perhaps even his discipline in our lives to make us more like Christ and different from the world around us.

Well, Phineas and the other 10 men soon returned to Shiloh to report what had happened to their brothers who were still gathered for war. And the report was also good in their eyes. The beautiful results of God's work in this situation were a glorifying of him as the people blessed him, and a relenting from destructive and deadly war between God's people. And now, what had been thought to be an altar of rebellion against God and separation among God's people, was now understood to be an altar of witness for future generations that the Lord is God forever, and his people, though separated by a river, are one, unified people of the presence of God; committed to loving him, walking with him, putting his Word into practice, clinging to and depending on him, and serving him together with all their heart and with all their soul. What a turnaround can take place when we allow God to direct and empower us in all things and when we keep his glory as the highest priority in all we do!

IV. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Well, as we consider what we've seen today in this passage and how it applies to our lives today, I'd like to briefly review and highlight two primary applications. First of all, we as believers in Christ desperately need to allow God to change the way we think and so often conduct our lives, to the point where we are people

like Christ who can be rebuked or offended or even treated unjustly without allowing it to blow up into a war where our primary concern becomes ourselves, our reputation, and our own glory.

Are you a rebukable person today? Can you handle a full frontal attack of pre-judgments without responding in anger? Can you even handle a gentle, good-intentioned, exhortation from a godly brother or sister in Christ? Or do you immediately go into defensive and self-justifying mode? How often are you offended and how do you deal with it when you are?

Proverbs 19:11 says this:

Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

I was reading recently (*I can't remember where*) how we in the church spend so much time and energy on trying to resolve conflicts and help people work through hard feelings and breakdowns in their relationships. There are even professional companies who specialize in going from church to church sorting out conflicts and helping offended parties work through their differences. But what if, by God's power and the principles of his Word, we learned how to be people who don't get offended in the first place; people who don't take the bait of Satan; people who are secure in their identity in Christ and confident of their incredible value to him, apart from what anyone else thinks; people who are much more concerned for God's glory than for their own reputation; people who trust God to judge justly and reveal the truth in his timing; people who are willing to go directly to another person with love and humility when there's a problem that needs addressed, instead of giving them the "cold shoulder" and waiting for them to figure it out and come to us.

My friends, this is where God is leading us as his people. And I pray that through what we've studied today, we'll be ready to get on board with his plan. That with trust in God and confidence in our secure identity as his beloved children, whom he views as a highly valued inheritance no matter what anyone else thinks of us...that we would be people who can be confronted and rebuked, even falsely, and respond the way the 2 ½ tribes did in our study today:

- 1) Being quick to hear and understand what's being said and slow to respond, measuring our words carefully;
- 2) Being concerned above all with glorifying God in all we say and do, no matter what the outcome;
- 3) Trusting ourselves into God's hands, knowing he knows the truth and will judge justly, and being willing to acknowledge and admit anything we've contributed to the problem;
- 4) Resisting the urge to respond in anger, but calmly and carefully sharing our perspective and our motives in the situation.

Imagine the glory of God and the love of Christ we will reveal to each other and to the world around us when we function this way in our relationships and in conflicts that arise! And if we, by God's power and belief in his Word, all became people who are extremely hard to offend, and who will take the first step to resolve and reconcile when it does happen.

And the final, brief application I want to highlight today relates to that altar of witness. We saw in our passage that the 2 ½ tribes were very concerned about passing on their faith and their walk with God to their children and future generations. They had put great thought into what they could do to make sure their children continued to walk with God after they were gone, and this large altar of witness was one way they were doing this. The stones of remembrance earlier in Joshua, and the monument at Shechem containing the written law of God, were two other ways the Israelites were working to pass on their faith to future generations. Additionally, God had instructed them to actively use other methods to teach their children about him and how to walk in his ways. In Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 to 9, Moses had said this:

4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The picture for us is intentionality and thought and planning about how we can live God's Word and pass it on to our children, incorporating our relationship with God and the principles of his Word into every part of our lives. So the question all of us with children need to answer is this: *What are the ways we're doing this right now with our own children?* It doesn't happen by osmosis. It happens when our relationship with God affects everything we do and say and our kids see us actually living what we say we believe.

And it happens when we intentionally have a plan for how we're going to "set the table" for our kids to know who God is and how they can walk through life with him by the principles in his Word. We can't make the choice for our kids to trust in Christ, believe his Word and walk with him, but we can give them every opportunity to know him, to see that he's real and powerful, to understand and apply the principles of his Word, and to be able to make that choice for themselves. Let's spend some time this week thinking about the specifics of what we're doing or not doing to create altars of witness for our children and for those around us, and how we can provide them with the utmost opportunity to choose Christ and experience life in his name.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE – 4/29/2018
Receiving Rebuke – Joshua 22:21-34

Read Joshua 22:21-34, 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 the following verses and summarize in the space below the various truths they teach us: Proverbs 15:1; 15:18; 15:28; 16:32; 17:14; 17:27; 18:2; 18:13; 18:19; 19:11.

Considering the truths from the Proverbs passages on the previous page, where do you most need to focus your attention in your own life and the way you respond to rebuke or confrontation? What do you think are some of the lies you're believing that cause you to struggle in this area?

What are some truths from God's Word that you need to believe to help you respond in a godly manner to rebuke, false accusations, or someone who offends you?

What are some intentional things you're doing right now to create altars of witness or evidences of God so that your children and those around you can have opportunities to know God and see Him action? What guidance does Scripture give about ways we can do this (Consider Deut. 6:4-9; John 13:34-35; John 17:20-23; Matthew 28:18-20....)?

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.