

“DON’T JUST SETTLE”

Judges 2:6-3:6

Sermon for Peace Church

January 13, 2008

PURPOSE - Call the church into kingdom battle, warning of the dire consequences if they only “settle”, and encouraging success in The Judge who leads in deliverance.

MAIN IDEA - When Israel gave up the cause of Kingdom advance, they fell into idolatry, judgment & defeat. But when they called to God, He brought them deliverance in the name of The Judge, Jesus Christ.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to Judges 2:6 (p. 374)

1. *“Fight the good fight of faith”* - is our battle-cry to begin 2008.

For YOU HAVE TERRITORY TO CONQUER, soldier of Christ Jesus!

(i) PERSONAL TERRITORY in LOVE - deeper, stronger, wider; more patient, wise, risky, free, more vulnerable & effective.

A. The Bible describes the Christian life as growing in the reign of God - from “glory to glory” ... ADVANCING in Christlikeness of character.

2. SOCIAL TERRITORY - yesterday our village celebrated the life & legacy of a Christian soldier who FOUGHT for justice & civil rights - Dr. King, Jr. Next weekend the whole nation pauses to honor him.

2. We too have CHURCH TERRITORY to conquer. Look at the back of your bulletin.

= a Peace Church GOAL STATEMENT developed a generation ago, but recently reaffirmed as our goals today:

Read Statement

(i) How are we going to achieve this?

BY YOU FIGHTING FOR IT! ... no other way ... that’s a battle! ...

cause there are spirits that would have us be merely a denominationally exclusive, segmented, inward, stuck & settled church.

3. Today's Scripture reading informs us of the DIRE CONSEQUENCES of God's people NOT going to battle ... NOT ADVANCING THE KINGDOM.

- Let's read this second introductory section of the Book of Judges

- *Read Judges 2:6-3:6*

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Verse 6, the beginning of our passage, describes its HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

- About 1300 B.C., Joshua had led the Israelites into their Promised Land = the inheritance / kingdom God says was there's to possess.

(MAP ON SCREEN)

(i) His campaign of the UNITED TROOPS began by crossing the Jordan River, into the Promised Land. Before that, while still under Moses' leadership, they had taken land EAST of the Jordan River. Then they crossed the river ... took Jericho ... the Southern Kingdom ... then went into the Northern part of the land.

- As I covered last week, this conquest was an expression of God's judgment against the wickedness of the tribes of Canaan - Israel being God's instrument for judgment.

A. Effectively, Joshua's campaigns CRACKED OPEN the Promised Land for Israel.

= "Broke the back of Canaanite resistance", as one commentator put it.

(ii) However, under Joshua, the ENEMIES of God were not completely destroyed.

WORK REMAINED TO BE DONE!

A. The end of ch. 2 & beginning of ch. 3 state that the remaining enemies were left to "TEST" Israel - to see if the next generation would be obedient to God's ways & calling - and to "teach warfare" to the descendants of Israel.

2. So at the end of his life, Joshua pulls Israel together and has a COVENANT RENEWAL CEREMONY at Shechem (recorded at the end of the book of Joshua).

- Like our Joshua, He has OPENED THE WAY to the inheritance that God has for His people

- He reminds them of the land that each tribe was allotted under Moses - to CONTINUE TO ADVANCE the reign of the true God

(SHOW SECOND MAP)

- And he commissions them to GO FOR IT with his famous “Who will you serve?” speech. *As for me & my house*, he adds, *WE WILL SERVE THE LORD*.

(i) So the tribes head off to the portions of the Promised Land allotted to them.
- and Joshua dies at 110 years of age. He is buried in hill country of EPHRAIM.

3. But here’s what happens: **THEY JUST SETTLE!**

They take those paths opened up by Joshua and simply find comfortable places to set up home, but they lose the vision of their mission: **TO CONTINUE TO ADVANCE THE REIGN OF GOD!**

- They don’t battle ... They just settle!

(MAPS OFF)

(i) General George Patten was asked, “If you could give a young soldier one piece of advice, what would it be?”

He responded immediately: **ALWAYS KNOW YOUR MISSION! (2X)**

A. ... because if you forget your mission, you lose the **ORIENTING FOCUS** of all your activities.

4. **WHAT IS YOUR MISSION?** (It’s not spend, spend, spend)

Personally it’s to **ADVANCE** in Christlikeness

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT ASSIGNMENT WITHIN THAT MISSION?

HERE’S A MISSION - WHAT IS YOUR ASSIGNMENT WITHIN IT?

III. THE PAINFUL CONSEQUENCES OF SETTLING

Our passage describes the devastating effects of God’s people **JUST** settling.

1. Verse 12 - *“They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them.”*

- If you stop swimming against the ungodly currents of society ... if you’re content only “**TREAD WATER**”, be a decent church member, > “I’ll just hold my own ... **YOU WON’T! YOU DON’T! YOU DRIFT BACK!!**

- Settlers invariably worship the various gods of the people around them - the gods of comfort, materialism & entertainment will capture the imagination - and you no longer dream God's dreams, you dream the world's dreams.

(i) We're called to be SOLDIERS in this age, NOT SETTLERS.

- We are the CHURCH MILITANT.

2. That consequence brings on others.

Verse 13 - *They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Asheroths.*

(i) ... And in His anger, God handed his people over to RAIDERS (v. 14) - *who PLUNDERED them ... DEFEATED them ... and they were in GREAT DISTRESS!*

A. A non-advancing Christianity, leads to a defeated life.

- A plundered church, marked by stress!

3. Perhaps SADDEST OF ALL, is the result described in verse 10:

After the previous generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.
= the NEXT GENERATION WAS LOST!

(i) They didn't know the Lord. Now I'm sure they heard the STORIES of the Lord. How they got out of Egypt ... how they first CRACKED OPEN the Promise Land. They knew OF the Lord - but they didn't KNOW the Lord - the Hebrew word means "know in experience" - they didn't know Him PERSONALLY ... they didn't know Him in battle experience.

(ii) It says in verse 7 that "during Joshua's time, they had seen all the GREAT THINGS that the Lord had done".

- But, because they were no longer battling to advance the kingdom, they were not talking at their dinner tables about GREAT THINGS God was doing in their lives / church / community.

A. John Piper comments, "*If we parents allow our children to grow up without the knowledge of God's power personally experienced, we serve not only their ignorance and unbelief, but also their DESTRUCTION.*"

IV. OVERCOMING THESE CONSEQUENCES

What do we do if we sense we've settled? ...and are experiencing the consequences of STAGNANT CHRISTIANITY?

1. There's HOPE in the story of Judges.

- For it contains a NARRATIVE CYCLE that we'll see again & again in this book:

God's people LOSE obedience to THEIR VISION ... fall INTO APOSTASY ... experience the CONSEQUENCES just described ... then they CALL OUT TO THE LORD in their distress & oppression ... and He has mercy - He sends them the NECESSARY LEADERSHIP to deliver them from DOLDRUM'S oppression.

(i) That's where the book gets its title. "JUDGES (v. 16) are leaders whom God raises up to deliver his people out of the hands of these raiders."

= Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson

- we'll look at some of their stories in the weeks to come.

A. As individuals who lead God's people out of distress, their stories point to THE Judge, Jesus Christ. He is OUR DELIVERER!

- Part of the message of this book is that God's people need a PERMANENT Judge. For as long as the leader lived, the people were faithful. But when he or she died, they again turned away from God.

- So the ERA of the Judges leads next to Israel's MONARCHY - King Saul / David / Solomon - a permanent kingship to unite the people. That too is fulfilled in Christ.

He is the JUDGE & KING that God sends to deliver his people, and restore them in obedience to their calling to ADVANCE THE KINGDOM!

2. Jesus does this today through TWO MEANS:

(i) One is by His Spirit who lives in the hearts of His people.

- By the power of His Spirit in us, Jesus calls forth leadership in God's cause!

A. So, if you're wondering, what's my ASSIGNMENT? How do I overcome a settled Christianity?

Because the Spirit lives in you, the first things to pay attention to, in answer to that question, are your GODLY FRUSTRATIONS.

Leadership begins in what Bill Hybels coins as, "HOLY DISCONTENT":

“What can’t you stand?”, he asks, “injustice, extreme poverty, racism, homelessness, AIDS, immoral business practices, dysfunctional churches, crappy music, crooked politicians, young people drifting further & further from God” ... the things that frustrate heaven & earth PRECEDE VISION - leadership’s most potent weapon.” = Holy Discontent, born of the Spirit.

(ii) What parts of THIS STATEMENT most stir in you holy discontent? That’s probable territory for you to begin to work in!

A. Hybels counsels: *“It’s not everything you get upset about. We ought to be looking for that one cause that grabs us by the throat and won’t let us go ... Don’t give up if the object of discontent is not obvious. Keep exposing your heart - travel more, visit ministries; keep looking ... and, most importantly, don’t run from it. Most of us run from our firestorm of frustration. One of the best things you can do is identify with it. When you find it, feed it. Increase your exposure. Stay close to your holy discontent.”*

= That’s one means by which God delivers His people. The Spirit of Christ in us.

LISTEN - v. 17 - to the Judge.

V. CONCLUSION

The other means is even more PRIMARY, and with it I close.

1. IT’S PRAYER.

Deliverance for God’s people does not come without them CRYING OUT, “Enough of this plundering & stress ... Save us Lord, save us ... deliver me - I’m living a half-baked Christian life..”

(i) CRYING OUT is an INDISPENSABLE part of the Judges Cycle.

- Listen to this short account which immediately follows today’s reading. It illustrates the cycle:

Read Judges 3:7-11

2. Deliverance came, v. 9, when God’s people “CRIED OUT to the Lord”/

- They called prayer meetings & people came
- They called prayer meetings and, if people couldn't come, they told those in charge, that they were totally with them and that they'd be praying privately.
- They thought of new opportunities to call people together to pray.

(i) Crying out to the Lord shows Him that:

- the oppression you're experiencing, you hate
- the advance of His reign is what you sincerely love.

A. Deliverance comes when God's people cry out.

3. SO WE HAVE HOMEWORK.

Beyond other opportunities for prayer in our church life, I put two prayers in your bulletin for you to pray this week - responding to the Word.

They've been put to music as hymns & come from a time in American Church History when God was not so strongly associated with the meeting of my needs; a time when the Christian life was more understood as OFFERING MYSELF to God's kingdom needs.

- They are prayers for kingdom-advance

(i) We rejoice in new music being written all the time to serve the church - like, "O Church Arise". But we too do not want to lose these great prayers of our tradition:

A. "God of Grace & God of Glory" - written in 1930 - by Harry Emerson Fosdick - for the dedication of Riverside Cathedral in New York City.

B. "Lead On, O King Eternal" - written in 1887 - by Ernest Shurtleff - for his graduating class at Andover Seminary, Massachuset.

(ii) We'll sing them to conclude our service. But we've also put them on an insert for you to continue to CRY OUT through this week:

*God of grace; God of glory - on Thy people pour Thy power
 ... Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;
 Let the joy of Thy salvation be our glory evermore.
 Grant us wisdom; grant us courage for the facing of this hour ...
 For the facing of this hour.*

Let's not settle! AMEN