

Preparing For A New Beginning

Sermon 11 – The Best Of Intentions, Joshua 22

Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church, June 25, 2006

Have your actions ever been misunderstood? Sometimes even the best of intentions are taken the wrong way and lead to conflict don't they? I'm sure it has happened to you, it's happened to me on many occasions. Why do such conflicts occur and what can we do about them?

Well, we have such a situation described in Joshua 22 and what I want us to do is take a look at the different parts of that incident in order that we might be better equipped to handle such conflicts in our own lives and in our church life. See Joshua 22.

I want to draw your attention first to the conflict, which developed in the first twelve verses...

I. The Rumor

Back before Israel had ever crossed the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half tribe of Manasseh approached Moses and sought permission to stay on the east side of the Jordan. It was good grazing land, they had lots of cattle, and so they wanted that land for their inheritance. Upon their willingness to go ahead and cross the Jordan with the rest, and help conquer the land, Moses agreed.

Well, they kept their end of the bargain. The battles were now over, the land had been conquered and divided, and it was now time to go home. So, in our passage, at a gathering, which included all the tribes of Israel, Joshua blessed Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and sent them on their way.

Now, that must have been a very special moment. They had been fighting side by side for seven years, during which time they had become the closest of companions. They lived together, worshipped together, ate together, laughed together, and cried together. You can imagine the hugs, the handshakes, the tears, and the final goodbyes as they departed best of friends. But once they reached the Jordan, crossed over, and then looked back at the land they had fought for, and the people they left behind, suddenly a feeling of separation began to settled over them: *What if in the*

years to come the other tribes forget what we have done and don't remember that we are a part of them, and exclude our children and our children's children from being a part of Israel?

As they thought on these things someone came up with an idea, “*Let's make a memorial altar as a witness between us and them!*” Well, they all thought it was a great idea! And so with newfound enthusiasm they began to work on it. In fact, you might say they got a little carried away with it because they didn't just build a little reminder, verse 10 tells us it was a “*great altar.*” They got to working on that thing and thought they would make it so big that nobody could miss it, so that you could see it for miles around.

Now, theirs was the best of intentions. Really! There was no wickedness in their heart or evil planned their motives were pure. But as is so often the case, even the best of intentions lead to conflict because they get misunderstood. That is certainly what happened on this occasion. Because once the other tribes found out about it they misunderstood their motives and were ready for war. See verse 12...

May I point out however that even theirs was the best of intentions. They thought that those two and a half tribes were building an altar to establish their own place of worship in rebellion against the Lord's altar in Shiloh. And so they really believed their anger was justified. Isn't that what we usually believe?

But I want you to notice what it was that precipitated this emotional response. See verse 11...

Why is it that we are so quick to hear, believe, and respond to unsubstantiated rumor? So often we are ready to go to war about something of which we don't even have the facts and that was certainly the case here. They were ready to go to war on the basis of what someone said. How often that scene is repeated amongst Christians in Bible believing churches today when we on the basis of unsubstantiated rumor attack a fellow believer. But do you notice here the potential danger of such a response? People's lives were at stake! They were ready to go to war over a rumor.

I have had to swallow a dose of this lesson myself. On too many occasions I have acted on rumor without checking it out first. Now, I have always apologized when I was wrong but the damage is already done and that's the

problem, once we strike out on the basis of suspicion or rumor the damage is done.

But I am glad that somehow in the midst of those agitated and turbulent emotions reason prevailed for Israel because in verses 13-29 we have an excellent response to conflict to learn from.

II. The Response

Notice, rather than the whole congregation going at once with their tempers flying against those two and a half tribes they chose a more sensible option. See verses 13-14...

They decided to send from their group some representatives on a fact-finding mission. They chose Phinehas, who had proven himself in the past uncompromising concerning the things of God (Numbers 31). They also chose one ruler from each tribe so that they all would be equally represented. This decision showed tremendous wisdom:

- (1) It gave the congregation a chance to simmer down and get their emotions under control rather than striking out prematurely.
- (2) It gave them an opportunity to learn the facts first hand. That way even if they went to war it would be based on something solid rather than rumor.
- (3) And by approaching the two and a half tribes with just a hand full of people it gave them the opportunity to talk things out.

Rather than having their emotions rule the day, their decision to find out the facts first saved them from a tremendous error in judgment. What a lesson we need to learn today! There is perhaps no greater reason why Christians get hurt and churches split than this: we don't take time to let our emotions simmer down and seek the facts before acting. We've got the attitude, "*I've just got to say this while I'm still bothered enough to say it!*" But all that leads to is war. A better approach is to step back for a moment.

Notice what else they did in verse 15...

Rather than getting mad but not doing anything about it, and we do that, or simply perpetuating the rumor, and we do that, they went to them and spoke with them about it. Now, that did not mean that they were compromising their position. What it meant was that they confronted them with their suspicions in a loving but firm manner. Loving confrontation does not mean you cannot express your fears clearly. Once they got there they could see the altar for themselves, so they did not mix their words at all. See verse 16...

They came right out with their suspicions. And may I say that the reason they were able to do that was because their genuine concern was obvious. They gave two illustrations of why they were so concerned:

- (1) In verses 17-18 they mention the iniquity of Peor, described in Numbers 25. On that occasion Israel worshipped a fertility god named "*Peor*". This act was committed through building an altar other than the altar of the Lord and on that occasion 24 thousand died under God's judgment. So, their fears weren't about something trivial, building another altar was serious business.
- (2) For their second illustration they mentioned the sin of Achan in verse 20. This is described back in Joshua 7. There, because of just one man's sin the whole nation suffered and here the fear was that two and a half tribes of the nation were doing something God had forbidden, so how much more would the whole nation suffer because of it.

Genuine concern is also expressed in verse 19...

They offered to give from what they had, out of their own pockets in order to preserve them from what they perceived to be a terrible sin. Very often we are willing to confront someone about their sin but when it comes to digging in our own pockets to change the situation well that's something else. That's the reason we fail on so many occasions when confronting someone about our suspicions, we don't demonstrate any concern, all we show them is that we're ready to chop their heads off, and so they prepare themselves for battle. War then becomes the inescapable outcome.

Beginning in verse 21 there was something else that they did, which is essential to a reasonable response...

What did those representatives do at this point? The answer is not, “*nothing*”, because they actively did something. They listened! Rather than continuing to ramble on or saying their piece and running off, they shut their mouths, opened their ears, and gave those two and a half tribes an opportunity to explain. And they made use of the opportunity:

First, in verses 22-23 they state as clearly as possible that they did not construct the altar to offer sacrifices on it.

Then, in verses 24-28 they explain what their intention was: they built the altar as a witness to the western tribes that they who lived east of the Jordan also had a place in the nation and with the Lord. Their concern was for the unity of the twelve tribes and not its division.

Have you ever had someone come and accuse you of something but not give you a chance to explain? It’s frustrating, isn’t it? Having a chance to explain here made a big difference. When we don’t follow the steps, which we’ve seen displayed in these verses, we’re going to end up with either someone getting hurt or outright war. But because they chose a reasonable response to their conflict: First, they sought the facts. Second, they lovingly but firmly confronted them with their suspicions. And third, they gave them an uninterrupted opportunity to explain. Because they did these things their situation concluded much differently than it might have. Rather than bloodshed between brothers they discovered that theirs really was the best of intentions and as a result we notice in verses 30-34 that the conflict was resolved. Read verses 30-34...

III. The Result

If you’ve ever tasted conflict but seen it resolved these words should be exciting to you. When they heard the explanation of the two and a half tribes it pleased them. They perceived that the Lord was among them. As a result they returned to the camp at Shiloh and explained to the rest what the facts really were, and it pleased them too. And they all began to praise God and no longer spoke of going to war. And that which had been an item of conflict then became a witness of their unity.

If only all our conflicts could end the same. You know what, they can, If we would take the time to let God’s wisdom prevail.

Maybe you realize that others have been hurt by the way you've confronted them in the past. Go to them and apologize.

Maybe you have been on the other end of that confrontation and you're the one that has been hurt. Forgive them as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Maybe you can't even imagine where the strength comes for such a response. 1 John 4:4 says, "*He who is in you is greater than he that is in the world.*" In Galatians 2:20 Paul says that strength comes from having Christ in your life. When we yield to Christ rather than our emotions we will find the strength for a reasonable response.

Maybe you have never personally received Christ as your Savior. That's the place to begin. Admit that you are a sinner. Believe that Jesus died for your sin. And call upon Jesus to save you from your sin and be your Savior.