

## New Year '01

The custom of self-examination at New Years, the setting of goals and even the resolutions are healthy things. Israel had three times a year when everyone had to stop and celebrate a feast of the Lord and examine where they stood with the Lord. They were times when all who were able would come together to the Temple. They feasted, reflected, sacrificed an offering to God and then returned to their day to day life.

Last year at New Year I challenged you all to make it a year in which you really dug into God's word, taking time daily to let it speak to you. I think most of you really took that challenge and it has made a difference in how you faced the trials and victories of the year 2000. Hasn't it? What would you have done without that strength that came from the direction God's word has given you?

On the other hand I think some of you wish you would have gone a little deeper as you needed that direction from the word to face the challenges this year presented.

We faced some tough challenges as a body. Moved twice with just one week notice. Three families have left. Not to mention all the personal trials and difficulties. But through it all, I believe, together we tried to see God's heart and not any one man's opinion. We have tried to let Jesus be the Lord and director of our fellowship and seek his leading. As a result I believe many lives have been touched through this little group. We could name some names but many more we could not name because only individuals in their ministry calling would know them. The elderly at the Atria, the Police and Fire Department members, and individuals that lost loved ones, some of our family members, youth at Cornerstone, all affected last year because of Christ expressing himself through you. He gets all the glory.

During the Thanksgiving Retreat the speaker shared from Judges chapter 18. I have been going through Judges this month and when I hit 18 I felt led to share it with you in regards to what we are reaching toward. Throughout the book of Judges we read the words, "Israel had no king, and every man did as he saw fit." The terrible consequences of that are throughout the book – especially in the last four chapters. The point was not that they needed a king like the other nations, for when they finally insisted on a king, the Lord told Samuel they were rejecting God as king. Israel was meant to be truly one nation under God. But instead, they had a nation of individuals being their own king. Isn't that what this nation of ours is trying so hard to be?

But lets look at this shadow of today in Judges 17. <sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah.<sup>2</sup> And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred *pieces* of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; I took it." And his mother said, "Blessed be my son by the LORD."<sup>3</sup> He then returned the eleven hundred *pieces* of silver to his mother, and his mother said, "I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image; now therefore, I will return them to you."<sup>4</sup> So when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred *pieces* of silver and gave them to the silversmith who made them into a graven image and a molten image, and they were in the house of Micah. Judges 17:1-4 (NASB)

This Ephraimite named Micah stole about 28 pounds of silver from his own mother. He hears his mother curse the thief and so he starts worrying. He confesses and decides to give the silver back. Mom is so touched she says, "I dedicate this entirely to the Jehovah for you to make an idol. But when she gets the silver in hand she only gives a five of the 28 pounds to the silversmith to make an idol.

What a perfect example of man playing his own god, being his own king. It begins with theft, followed by the fear of a curse of man not the judgment of God. The mother looks all 'spiritual' and dedicating it to Jehovah until you find out what for- to break his very first two commandments! To add injury to offense she only takes a portion of what she promised to give, but since it is for an idol, maybe that is a good thing? I don't know, it is so contrary to God and his ways the whole thing is a chaotic mix of sin and selfishness. That is what happens when we set aside the Word of God to play god ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some idols and installed one of his sons as his priest.<sup>6</sup> In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. Judges 17:5-6 (NIV)

Well there you have it. Who needs to go to the tabernacle in Shiloh when you can have idols and an ephod right here at home? How convenient! You see, when Israel refused to let JHWH be king over the nation and were their own kings, chaos reigned. Convenient, "spiritual", selfish chaos. Hey, if your son is priest he isn't going to ask you to change. He'll hear from god anything you want him to hear. Christ Jesus is king of the true church. Today there are huge religious governmental structures, machines that crank out the formulas and the plans for all their branch offices to follow. Setting aside the word, they operate in a way that brings the results they want. "We'll still call him LORD but we will run the show. It's much safer, much more predictable and besides it goes where we want it to go." It is kind of like England or Japan's monarchy. We have a king in title, we just don't let him have anything to do with the way things are run. We can take care of that. I'm not pointing this out to condemn any group but to caution us that we remain clear in determination to let the Lord Jesus be king over us, give us his direction, and not dictate to Him how we will operate, but earnestly seek his leading and instruction, that will line up with his word.

<sup>7</sup> A young Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, who had been living within the clan of Judah,<sup>8</sup> left that town in search of some other place to stay. On his way he came to Micah's house in the hill country of Ephraim.<sup>9</sup> Micah asked him, "Where are you from?" "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah," he said, "and I'm looking for a place to stay." Judges 17:7-9 (NIV)

The problem isn't just in Micah's house it is everywhere. This Levite and his family were assigned a town by Joshua. He was supposed to minister in the tabernacle, supported by tithes and offerings. What is he doing wondering around looking for (a call)? Perhaps Judah no longer paid enough tithes to support him, or maybe he felt he wasn't paid enough, but whichever, this was not God's design.

<sup>10</sup> Then Micah said to him, "Live with me and be my father and priest, and I'll give you ten shekels of silver a year, your clothes and your food."<sup>11</sup> So the Levite agreed to live with him, and the young man was to him like one of his sons.

<sup>12</sup> Then Micah installed the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in his house.<sup>13</sup> And Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since this Levite has become my priest." Judges 17:10-13 (NIV)

What just happened? Micah hired a personal priest. The priest is in search of a new call, and gets one, likes the salary contract, takes the position, idols and all. That doesn't happen today of course?! You all realize that God has made each of you a royal priest and when we come together you don't look to a paid professional to take care of an idol. I hope! But the heart of man never changes and this is true in so many places. And notice how Micah now expects god to bless him because he has a Levite priest. How twisted and yet this is how much of the church operates today. We just need the right man to tend our idol and god will be good to us, cafeteria Christianity.

The mind of Micah is that if I pick out parts of the Law and do them I will win God's favor, after all it is more than other people do. Micah doesn't realize God is good in his nature and will be good no matter what you do. But pleasing God and God being good are two different things. The only thing truly pleasing to God is his son Christ Jesus. His life in us is what pleases Him and that is total submission not picking and choosing to gain his favor.

Let us apply this to our fellowship. We can do all kinds of things the word says we should do. We can pick out and perform and point to them as reasons God should bless us, but one thing alone will please Him, His Son. We can build some great idol of a building, have a great program or two or three or 100, but if the life of Jesus is not manifesting Himself in us we stand in Micah's place, with a cool 5 pound idol of silver and priest to preach us a sermon each week. If we need god's direction – he will go talk to the idol for us.

I encourage you to read chapter 18 - the tribe of Dan steals the idol and gives the priest a better job offer. He takes the position, onward and upward. Must have been pleasing to god because god is giving him a bigger church. With Moses own grandson the whole tribe of Dan takes this little 5 pound idol as their god. Now we have the denomination of the idol of Micah, verified by Moses own grandson, which all began with a man stealing from his own mother. The tribe of Dan is doing as they see fit.

We can grow in numbers but if we do not grow around the living Lord Jesus it is not just worthless but counterproductive to the Kingdom of God. I'm still looking forward to the day of worship when each of you come with something to share from your walk with God this week. Or something the Lord has spoken to you through His word. When we are walking with our Lord in a living personal relationship every day we will see his hand and marvel at what He is doing in and through and to us. How exciting when we become more aware of his hand in our lives each day! It will change our attitude as we see discern Him working in our situations.

It starts with a premise of faith that He is good and working for the good in your life on a daily basis. And so with eyes of faith we begin to see with Abraham – Him who is invisible – to discern his working. As we compare those workings with the characters in his word we see similarities and because the ways of God do not change. He is always holy, just, righteous, working constantly to change us to his image. He is always more

concerned with our relationship with Him than our temporal comfort. The more we see Him at work the more peace we possess. I think Jesus must have been the most peaceful person to walk the planet because He fully discerned the work of God in Him, around Him, and knew things were in his Father's capable hands. No running around in a panic, just a trust and calm assurance.

This year let us continue to drink deeply from the Word but can I add this challenge today, that we make '01 a year in which we yield ourselves and our fellowship more fully to Jesus as King of His church? Let us watch day by day to see his hand and learn from Him of his ways. Rejoice in what He is doing and share with each other what He is speaking to us even more than we have till now? That requires a personal commitment of time to contemplate and be still, knowing He is God. That time each day is needed to reflect on how He is working and maybe even to write down what You sense the Holy Spirit is speaking, so you can remember and so you can share it with us. James tells us to be quick to listen. More than ever this year let us seek the leadership of King Jesus!

AS we abide in Him – He will bring forth much fruit.