

The Ancient Paths 9-22-02

Jer. 6:13-17 (NIV) *13 "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. 14 They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. 15 Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD. 16 This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' 17 I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.'*

After Solomon died the nation of Israel was split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. The Northern ten tribes went straight into idolatry, ignoring God's instructions to them. Though they prospered at times and had true prophets warning them, they went into captivity a hundred years before the south and most of the survivors were integrated into the world. The Southern two tribes had some God fearing kings and some evil ones that promoted idolatry. Their story is a repeating record of idol worshipping kings bringing about ruin and defeat and Godly kings being blessed and building up the nation. Up and down they went.

I believe this is an applicable picture of the church today. There are denominations that, like the Northern tribes, have replaced the Jesus of the Bible with the idolatry of man's enlightened mind. The carnal wisdom of man has decided what is of value in God's word and what is not applicable today. The idol is their so-called 'enlightened' thinking. Their numbers are dwindling and they are pretty much already in captivity. There are just too many other clubs that compete for man's time to really prosper, and after all, if the Bible is just a good book, all you have is a book club. They have integrated with the world.

In the record of the Southern tribes you will find some of the folks fled from the North and joined with the South to worship the true God. All throughout their history they struggled with the same issues. Is Jehovah the one true God or are the gods of their neighbors of value? In archeological excavations shrines to idols in the homes in the south have been discovered. No doubt they worshipped during the feast days at the Temple to please Jehovah and at home they bowed to their idols. I have seen excavations of a Southern city that had their own mini temple, something expressly forbidden in the Law. The Bible's record of the Southern tribes shows that compromise was commonplace.

Since the Old Testament was written, as the Apostle Paul wrote, "for our instruction", what parallels do we see in the church today to those Southern tribes? I am referring to Bible believing churches and the church as a whole in our culture. I think the parallel is clear. "Let us go to church on Sunday and express our belief in the Bible as God's word, but let us go home and live during the week bowing to our idols of prosperity and comfort. We will still promote all the political issues of the church and be religiously correct, but I'm not going to let it interfere with my life. I'm not going to get fanatical and live like the weirdoes in the Bible. That was a different time and they had a special call and ... blah, blah, blah", with one thousand and one excuses why we can compromise.

Here is the real problem. Just like the people of Judah we have fallen for a lie. The lie is that there is something worth living for outside of God. They thought there was value in seeking after something other than God. What are you seeking? What is your goal? What is your life about? For too many of us it is just to be comfortable and secure. Comfort and

predictability are our idols. 1 Tim. 5:6 (NIV) *6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

For some it is respectability and importance. What gets between you and wholehearted devotion to God? The very root of sin is the love and worship of self over God. Our lives should be about the One who died for us. 2 Cor. 5:15 (NIV) *15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

'No longer live for self', the Apostle wrote. Would you say that describes you? Or are you living for self and yet claiming to live for Him who died for you? Is your life all about your Savior or you? If you were to describe the perfect life, would it be about possessions and places, or about a deeper spiritual walk with Jesus? Our answer to that question will tell us a great deal about what our idols are or our hunger for intimacy with God.

I believe God is really challenging every believer to smash all our idols and get excited about loving God with abandon! Nothing else is good enough for God, nothing less is worthy of Him. Nothing else is going to fill your heart. Nothing less will bear fruit that remains, and nothing less will impress and change the lives we come in contact with. If we will get on fire for God, people will be drawn to the light like moths to the flame, because they will see there really is something to live for besides comfort and security. I really believe that one of the major reasons we don't see more people, especially in the younger generations, come to Christ is that we are not loving Him with our all. One of the prerequisites for revival must be that we become humbly desperate for God to expose the areas of our lives that don't look like Jesus.

If people aren't being drawn to Christ here, we have to ask ourselves why! You may have heard this definition of insanity: "Believing you can get different results from doing the same thing over and over!" Are we guilty of thinking we can just keep going along in the same way and somehow people will one-day come to Jesus? They aren't coming because my life is not attracting them. *"Pride is a subtle sin easily overlooked. Perhaps the worse form of pride is the attitude of spiritual complacency that sees little need for cleansing and growth in one's own life. True revival always begins with deep humility and brokenness over sin (2Chron. 7:14)."*¹

I have really been grieved in my spirit this week about the testimony of Jesus that goes out from His body. You and I represent Jesus in everything we do. When I accepted the call to ministry, I realized anything in my life that was not an example of the life of Jesus had to die in my life. If there was any question it had to go. But we are all representatives of Jesus. Just because you call yourself a Christian, everything you do, every attitude you show, every gossip you share, and word you say, people take as a reflection of what it means to belong to Christ. He graciously shares His name with us. Please think about that. Think before you speak. What if you were to preface everything you said with, "As a representative of Jesus who loves you and gave Himself for you I say ..." Would you still say it? That is how those who know you are Christians receive it. We must realize people are deciding for or against Christ because of our testimony, the way we live. I tell you the truth, I have been in tears this week thinking that is how the unbeliever sees Jesus.

God asks us to follow Him wholeheartedly because that is the right thing to do, the reason we were created, we owe Him that much AND it is where we will find the joy of truly living.

"If any man will save his life he will lose it!" Jesus said. (Mark 8:35) That is what the Jews were trying to do. "A little religion never hurt anyone and we need to cover all our bases so we can get into heaven, be on the right side, but don't go and get fanatical. God might ask you to do something you don't want to do, like lay down your life, your goals and dreams and get new ones that involve some of that nasty word, 'SACRIFICE'." "If you save your life you will lose it!" That is a fact. That is the warning from the Giver of Life, a reality check. Cling to life and die. Release it and live. Do you really believe that? Then are you clinging or surrendering? Are you insisting on your way or yielding to God's? This week I had an offer that would really help grow this church. I had to say "no thanks" to that generous offer because the Spirit of God told me it was not God's plan. I'm not here to build a church, I'm here to please my Savior. I wish I could say that I am consistent at all times to only desire to please Him, but self so subtly sneaks in to demand its way. Our Savior deserves our all and nothing less. Do I have any other agenda than that of my Lord's?

Commented [Q1]: 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.
Mark 8:35 (NIV)

"But if you lose your life for Jesus and the Kingdom of God, you will find it!" Jesus went on to say. There are those who have found it and those who are searching and those who are still clinging to their life in almost every church. Just like there were in the days of the nation of Judah, we have religious people, seeking people, and surrendered to God people. There are even some out and out idol worshippers, sometimes, but hopefully they become a seeker and get saved or get too uncomfortable with the preaching of the truth. Before you declare yourself to be the Spirit filled surrendered person, realize that most of the religious leaders of Jesus' day would have said the same thing.

David prayed, "Search me O God and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Ps. 139:23, 24) "Examine me! Shine your penetrating light of truth and see if I desire anything but You. Expose any desire that is selfish, that is worldly, or complacent, and help me see the lie in my heart that would even cause me to desire those things. What? Did I think something would compare with God? Did I think His creation was somehow more to be desired than Him? Have I listened to some lie of Satan that there is something God would withhold that is really good for me? What arrogance! What pride in me to think that! How audacious for me to listen to a thought or an idea that goes against my loving Creator's good intentions for me!" John 3:19-21 (NIV) 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." Are you coming to the light to see what needs to change or so comfortable you are avoiding the light?

When Hezekiah restored the Temple worship and the people returned to God they went on an iconoclastic spree. They went idol busting. They went up on the high places and took a sledgehammer to the rocks that were worshipped. They chopped down the poles that were worshipped. They destroyed the temples to false gods. Some of us have come to God with a heart to be surrendered. We made a new covenant with Him, the new covenant in His blood. But we let the idols remain. As you read through those stories of the good kings you often see this little side note, "But they did not remove the High Places." (1Kings 15:14) There was some reserve. "If Jehovah doesn't work out, or asks a little too much of me, I can always go back to ..." NO! That is not worshipping God as God. That is not losing your life

Commented [Q2]: 14 Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life.
1 Kings 15:14 (NIV)

to find it. That means when things get tough, when you are tested, instead of going deeper with God you are ready to go back. Luke 9:62 (NIV) *62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

You are going forward or backward. There is Lot's wife, gazing at the things her soul desired, she is salt! You are the salt of the earth but you've got to keep moving. If you stand still, looking back instead of moving forward in your relationship with God the salt dumps in one place and poisons the earth so that nothing grows. MOVE! Go deeper. Challenge yourself to hear the voice of conviction and obey. It doesn't matter how young or old you are. You are never too young to start living all out for God and never too old to let the Holy Spirit point out areas where you need to change and grow. Hear God's leading in your life and move forward. God is always drawing you deeper into life in Him if you are willing to hear and obey.

We get to these places where we say, "Enough sacrifice for awhile. I'm getting burned out." Now it is true that you can do too much at man's direction, but you can't do too much at God's leading because He empowers you and equips you to do what He asks you to do. I could wear all of you out with programs and functions until you were sick of church. But if it is Jesus' presence drawing us together by the Holy Spirit in service to Him, it will be so exciting and so rewarding you will long for more. That is the difference. Not that it won't be demanding and difficult at times – most times, but there is the strength that comes from above and the anointing that empowers you to do God things!

In John 5 Jesus came across a paralyzed man who had been waiting at place of healing for 38 years. Verse 6 *When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"* Seems like a rhetorical question, or one with some deep insight. Since it was Jesus, I would guess it was deep insight. Do YOU want to get well? After so long you get used to things the way they are and find your comfort zone. Certain people probably helped this guy out, gave money on a regular basis, taking pity on him, and that felt nice. You get familiar with the other invalids and in a strange way enjoy commiserating. Do you want to get well? I ask that because sin in our lives, every area that is not like Christ, is a disease upon our existence. Do we really want Jesus to point it out and change it?

I've seen in my life and in others, how we cling to our disease. We can masterfully justify it in ways that would convince anyone, anyone but Jesus. He knows the real priorities in our lives. He knows where we are stepping across the bounds and rejecting His leading, saying a clear "no thanks" to His prompting.

Max Lucado gives a great illustration of what is happening. He took his little girl to the park and decided to buy her an ice cream cone. When he went to give it to her, he saw her mouth was covered with dirt. He took her to wash her mouth out, even though she didn't want to. She got upset with him putting water in her face. Finally he got her all cleaned up so she could eat the ice cream, and only then did she realize Dad was trying to give her something better.

Dad wants to give You something better! I'm not talking to someone else, I mean YOU. The dirt in your mouth is just that! It is not only bad for you but it keeps you from enjoying

something much better that God has for you! Those of you who know the Father know that is true. Some of you who don't quite know Him yet are wondering. Both groups will put off having their face washed because it just isn't fun. Even when we know that something better is coming, if we haven't tasted it yet, the face washing is something we want to put off. Do you want to get well? Do you want to love God with abandon? Are you willing to lay down your idols of comfort or complacency and follow Jesus? We sing these words, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold." Look at this little mite. It was the penny of the Roman world. "I won't even hold back a penny. God, I give you my comfort, my security, my plans and my dreams. I'm yours. You are Lord, Master. I'll be your obedient child because You alone know what is best for me. I want to live a life of worship, not just Sundays! I want my testimony to honor You, not drive people away."

All through the New Testament believers are referred to as saints. That word was borrowed from the Greek culture. Meat that was offered to an idol, laid on the altar, was *hagios*. Irrevocably given to God to do with as He pleased. The Apostle Paul took that word and said, "Hey, that describes a real Christian. A hunk of meat given over to the Lord Jesus to do with as He pleases." Are you a saint? It doesn't mean you're perfect, but it does mean the overall picture of your present life is one surrendered to God.

I'm asking us to do some real soul searching right now, through the day, through the week and the months to come. If we want to see people come to Jesus we need to show them Jesus in our lives. What keeps my life from expressing Christ's likeness? Do I love Him enough to forsake it?

I want to challenge the men of this congregation. Over the next couple months I'd like for you to give the Lord one hour of your Sunday evenings, 7-8p.m. to really examine every area of our lives. If this church is going to go forward we need some men that will seek God and not their own preferences or comfort zones. We need men that are completely yielded to God in every area of their lives. We'll meet here and together go through a book that helps us take stock of every area of our lives and discover to what extent we are surrendered to the LORD. Women, you can encourage the men to take the time, and pray for their schedules to allow them to. One of our greatest challenges in this culture is the demand on our time. Corrie Ten Boom said, "The devil laughs when we get too busy." Pray for the men not to be too busy for this time of examination by the Holy Spirit. Pray for transformation.

Let's take some time right now to let the Holy Spirit begin to shine in our hearts this morning. Most of you know Christ as your Savior. Do you know Him as Lord? Does He make the decisions in your life, and in your home? On the cross, He held back nothing from you! What is it you are withholding from Him? Is the dirt in your mouth really that good? Let Him shine on it this morning and expose it. Are you trusting in your wealth? Are you secure in a set of circumstances? What are you really relying upon? If it is anything other than Jesus, you need to give it into His hands. Most of us know, when we are honest, the areas where we have not surrendered. The Holy Spirit has already been at work and we've been arguing away with Him, as if we could convince Him we are right. Will you give up arguing this morning and lose it for His sake and yours. Will you lose your life to find it?

ⁱ From *Returning to Holiness* by Dr. G. Frizzell pg 25