

October 6, 2020

Words to inspire and challenge.

There is a great problem in churches today. The problem is procrastination. Procrastination manifests itself in churches everywhere in the forms of indifference, apathy, and laziness. We see it in churches daily in that they make great plans about what they want to do and then fail to follow through with those plans. Read with me from Joshua 18:1-10.

1 Then the whole congregation of the sons of Israel assembled themselves at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there; and the land was subdued before them. 2 There remained among the sons of Israel seven tribes who had not divided their inheritance. 3 So Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "How long will you put off entering to take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you? 4 Provide for yourselves three men from each tribe that I may send them, and that they may arise and walk through the land and write a description of it according to their inheritance; then they shall return to me. 5 They shall divide it into seven portions; Judah shall stay in its territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall stay in their territory on the north. 6 You shall describe the land in seven divisions, and bring the description here to me. I will cast lots for you here before the LORD our God. 7 For the Levites have no portion among you, because the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance. Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh also have received their inheritance eastward beyond the Jordan, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them." 8 Then the men arose and went, and Joshua commanded those who went to describe the land, saying, "Go and walk through the land and describe it, and return to me; then I will cast lots for you here before the LORD in Shiloh." 9 So the men went and passed

through the land, and described it by cities in seven divisions in a book; and they came to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh. 10 And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD, and there Joshua divided the land to the sons of Israel according to their divisions.

There are several expressions or figures of speech that are popular within churches. Some of these phrases and sentences are good. Such as, "What can I do to help?" "Let us pray to God and seek His will." There are many others that are good and uplifting expressions in churches. Moreover, certain expressions are destructive to the spiritual growth of churches and lead to sin as well. I will only share one of these with you today. I am certain that every one of us has said this or something like it before, "I'll get around to it." This expression presents a plethora of problems for us as individuals and as a church.

Seven of Israel's tribes kept putting off entering into the Promised Land to take possession of it. Many Christians and churches put off or procrastinate doing what God commands.

The bottom line: procrastination is sin, as such there are a number of perils associated with or derived from procrastination. When we condone procrastination in others we foster an atmosphere of laziness. There are numerous passages of Scripture detailing for us the sinful nature of laziness. The Sage teaches, "Laziness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle man will suffer hunger. The one who keeps the commandment keeps their soul, but the one who is careless in their ways will die" (Proverbs 19:15-16). Procrastination is ultimately rebellion against God. Jesus expresses this very well as the slothful, wicked slave is cast out of the king's sight for failing to invest the talents entrusted to him (Matthew 25:14-30).

Procrastination can lead to spiritual death. There are some people who continue to reject the truth of Jesus and they will continue to do so

until one day it will be too late. Felix the governor, “While discussing righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,” with Paul declares, “Go away for the present and when I find time, I will summon you” (Acts 24:25). What happened to Felix? We do not know except that he left Paul in prison for two more years and was then replaced by Festus. Nevertheless, if one continues to live rejecting Jesus rest assured that there will come a day when it will be too late.

Procrastination leads to unpreparedness. Consider the story of the “Ten Virgins.” Those who were prepared were able to enter in with the Bridegroom to the wedding feast (Matthew 25:1-13). If we hope to be relevant to this community and to the world we must be prepared. We must spend time with God in prayer, study, and worship. In the end we must recognize that procrastination is unfaithfulness towards God and is sin. Procrastination is SIN!!

Jesus instructs on the perils of procrastination and only those who do the will of the Heavenly Father will enter into heaven. Who is it then that does the will of God? It is those who believe in Jesus by faith. Paul explains, “By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: Not as a result of works so that no one should boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus tells of two foundations, of two kinds of people, those who hear the words of Jesus and fail to act upon them and those who hear Jesus words and then act upon them. Those who fail to act are foolish procrastinators who have heard life changing words and never got around to doing anything with them. Jesus tells us that these people are foolish in that they never had a strong foundation upon which to build their lives. In times of difficulty they fell apart. Yet, those who not

only heard Jesus' words, but also acted upon them had an unshakable foundation upon which to build their life. This is true of churches as well.

How then can we break free from the "Round Tuit" Syndrome? First be strong in the Lord. God encourages Joshua three times to be strong. We are also called to be strong. Our mission will require great strength, great endurance, and extreme dedication. Our strength is not our own. Our strength is found in Jesus Christ. Paul encourages, "... Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1). Be strong yes, but make sure that your strength is in the Lord.

Be courageous. In order to be courageous we must act. That is what we believe must be done. Do you believe that God called you into a relationship with Him? Then act upon that belief in faith. Courage is living our faith daily. Act upon your faith. Call upon God to keep His promises to you (Philippians 4:19).

Be obedient. We are called to obedience. This means we not only profess with our lips but we also live daily what we believe. Jesus, from the "Sermon on the Mount" declared, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Study God's word. Paul instructs Timothy, and us, "Study!, to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who need not be ashamed, rightly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Let each of us commit to studying God's word. Not only studying, but also living God's word.

Obey God. Be faithful to His call for you to, “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). “To make disciples of all the nations”(Matthew 28:19). It is required of us to love God with all that makes us who we are. It is required of us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And it is required of us to forgive as God forgives us. “It is required of us to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

Joshua needed to intervene on behalf of the 7 tribes. Part of the problem we endure in the world today is our failure to act as God has commanded. Pray with me.

Almighty God, help us to overcome procrastination and begin in earnest the work that you call us to do in Jesus' name, amen.

Until the nets are full