

October 8, 2020

Be ENCOURAGED!

Many Christians live each day believing since they live under grace there is no obligation to live in obedience. This is absolutely wrong. Jesus in the Great Commission instructs us to teach prospective disciples to obey all that He has commanded us (Matthew 28:20). Moreover, for those who have heard of Jesus and rejected Him their rebellion and rejection will lead them to judgment in the great day of the Lord and potentially here on this earth as well. Read with me Judges 3:1-14.

1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; 2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly). 3 These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. 4 They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. 5 The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; 6 and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. 7 The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. 8 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. 9 When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz,

Caleb's younger brother. 10 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. 11 Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died. 12 Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. 13 And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. 14 The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

Every Christian has things in their lives that often hold them back from enjoying the fullness of God's blessings. Some of these things are old habits or acquaintances from our lives before we met Jesus. The people of Israel also had things around them and in their lives that held them back from enjoying God's greatest blessings as well: things that led them to rebellion against the Lord.

God, however, will leave some things around us from our life before Jesus in order to test us so that we will learn about God's faithfulness to us. These things in our lives or around us hold us back from enjoying God's greatest blessings. So how can we overcome those things in our lives that hinder us from living in faithful obedience to God?

In our Scripture the people of Israel began a cycle of enslavement and liberation. God used Judges to liberate Israel from slavery. Othniel is the first judge. Soon after Joshua's death Israel fell into idolatry that led to enslavement by the Mesopotamian king, Cushan-rishathaim. You will notice after Othniel's death Israel again fell into idolatry and apostasy and are enslaved by the Moabites.

After the conquest of Canaan Israel dwelt among the various tribes/nations still living in the Promised land. Scripture reveals the

Lord left these people there to test Israel to see whether or not they would remain faithful to God. When we come to God many things from our life before Jesus remain around us. It may be these things remain to validate our desire to live in obedience to God. God already knows how we will respond to those things that test us, but we need to recognize how God remains faithful to us despite our faithlessness to God.

Scripture reveals Israel “Forgot the Lord”(vs.7). As a consequence Israel was enslaved to one of the tribe/nations left in the Promised Land. Consequences will also befall us as we will be enslaved to our sin when we forget the Lord.

What are the consequences of unfaithfulness to God? We remain subjected and oppressed by sin and world forces. We live without purpose and direction. There will be accountability or judgment by God. Those believing in Jesus ceasing to live faithfully to God are held accountable for what is done as stewards in God’s kingdom. Those rejecting Jesus judgment ends in hell.

There are blessings for faithfulness. Some of these are enjoying the peace of God. Experiencing joy and having it more abundantly. And enjoying God’s provision.

How can we remain faithful to God? All relationships, if they are to remain vibrant and strong, require commitment to the relationship from both parties in the relationship. Jesus’ commitment to the relationship was on full display as “God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Jesus” (2 Corinthians 5:21). What is the level of your commitment to your relationship with God? What are some things we can do right now to strengthen and deepen our relationship with God? I want you to remember ACE. Historically an ACE is one who is excellent at what they do.

ACT: If we are to be faithful Christians we must ACT upon what we believe. Throughout Scriptures numerous passages call for God's people to ACT. Jesus challenges us to ACT. He asks bluntly, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and ACTs upon them, (...) is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not ACTed accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6:46-49).

COMMUNICATE: Effective COMMUNICATION requires one who sends the message and one who receives the message. When we COMMUNICATE with God do we wait for an answer? When God COMMUNICATES to us do we listen? There is no such thing as no COMMUNICATION for even silence is sending a message.

ENCOURAGE: As Christians we know we are our brother and sisters' keeper. We look after each other holding each accountable for the way we live our lives. The author of Hebrews admonishes, "Let us consider how to stimulate [ENCOURAGE] one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but ENCOURAGING one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Living unfaithfully to God leads to judgment; unfaithfulness always results in judgment. Our challenge is to live each day in ACTing in faith; COMMUNICATing with God; and ENCOURAGing each other. Let us pray.

Gracious Lord thank You for always being faithful to us. Help us to live each day in faithful obedience through Jesus Christ, amen.

Remember to be an ACE is to be excellent in what you do. ACT,
COMMUNICATE, ENCOURAGE--ACE.

Until the nets are full