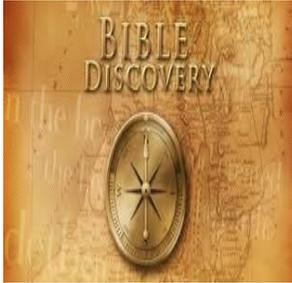


May 18, 2014

Numbers 25:1-15

Cozbi of Zur, Zimri and the Zeal of Phinehas



We have before us a very hard reading of God's Word. We know our Father as a God of love and we thank Him continuously for His grace and mercy. We remember that our Heavenly Father loved us so much that while we were sinners, living far from His holy ways, He chose to reach down and give us life through His own Son, Jesus Christ who came and opened the doors of heaven that we may see the Father through Him and then climbed Mt. Calvary taking upon Himself your sins and mine.

The question for us and for all who have received Christ as their Lord and Saviour is "how do we treat the gift we have received from God"? Do we trample God's grace under our feet? Do we continue in sin thinking somehow God's grace will increase? Paul emphatically demands, "**BY NO MEANS!** We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" [Romans 6:2]

**How do we treat
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received from God?**

Let me explain the backdrop to our story. Some of you may remember Balaam who was a prophet for hire against the Israelites from Numbers 22-24 – he made 4 failed attempts to curse Israel and cause them to falter against their enemies culminating his donkey talking back to him. It seems that was enough – only we know the enemy doesn't give up that easy. So Satan's new plan is "**if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!**" That's what he did through the madam's of Moab and Midian. It probably started with neighbourliness; hey look at the cute girls, let's join their feast, it starts seemingly harmless enough; these folks are really friendly, they're no threat. Come on and join us – their sacrifices are just glorified BBQ's – it's just an idol anyway (and we know they *ain't* real) so where the harm? Flirtation, misdirected alliances, compromise and then full blown rebellion against the Holy Living God! Peter reminds us that if Satan does not succeed as the devouring lion; he'll sneak in as the deceiving serpent! [1 Peter 5:8] Here's a 7-step process that, *if left unrecognized*, will lead to moral compromise and failure. It is essential that as we live Christian lives we are ever aware of the enemy and remain focused through God's Holy Spirit **on His statutes of life [His Word!]** guiding us to be ready to stand against what the enemy desires for our lives.

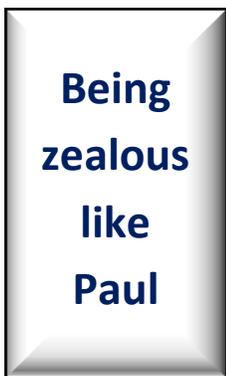
1. A *failure* to commit ahead of time to do the right thing. "The man who stands for nothing will fall for anything" is the way the saying goes.
2. Underestimating evil and flirting with dangerous temptations. (*Just having fun!*)
3. A failure to recognize the numerous forms of compromise lurking at every corner of life.
4. A failure to recognize the smooth flatteries and enticing fantasies of temptations.
5. Succumbing to slick, quickly spoken, rationalizations.
6. A sudden, deliberate choice to give in to sin.
7. A failure to consider the costly eternal consequences of sin.

**IT TAKES
TAKING
A STAND!**

What it takes is taking a stand! It was one man *Zimri* who flagrantly continued to violate the Lord's command. It was one man, *Phinehas*, who stood up to the abomination occurring in the presence of God and took action for coming apart and for holiness. Sometimes the only way to stop the advance

of a wickedly infectious disease is through amputation of the gangrened limb. It is recognizing that God takes our idolatry; that He takes all sin seriously. In demonstrating zeal for God, Phinehas is rewarded with the commendation of the Lord.

To be a person with a zest for zeal – to be at the zenith of your zest for zeal – to be zealous in faith – you must be pre-eminently a person of one thing. You only see one thing, care for one thing, live for one thing; you’re swallowed up in that one thing; and **that one thing is to please God!** Whether you live, or die; whether you have health or sickness; whether you are rich or poor; whether what you do pleases man, or leaves man offended; - whether you’re considered wise or foolish; whether you are blamed or praised; whether you’re honoured or shamed - for all this the zealous person cares nothing at all. His heart burns for one thing; and that one thing is to please God - to advance **God’s glory**. If his heart is consumed within the very burning, he does not care for giving God glory is sufficient and for that he is content. In burning, he feels that, like a lamp, he is made to burn; and if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. He has brought light to a darkened world and shown Christ to those who have come into the light. That is what it is to be zealous! I am reminded of the Apostle Paul, who proclaimed,



“As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

[2 Corinthians 6:4-10]

And I read the story of a man, Eugene Ormandy, who several years ago dislocated his shoulder. What makes the story so amazing is that the injury occurred while he was directing the Philadelphia Orchestra. We don’t know if Phinehas was ever musical, but we do know that Phinehas was a man of great zeal for God. The grandson of Aaron he was not able to stand back and resolve in his heart that there was any room for the desecration of God’s house when Zimri parades with this Midianite priestess Cozbi right through the gathered Israelites who’re discussing the LORD’s edict to rid the disease of that very sort of wickedness, proceeding to conduct sexual activities at the entrance to the Tabernacle, the House of God. The audacious action of this Israelite man is unparalleled and totally unexpected. The contempt for the holy things, for the Word of the Lord, shown by Zimri and his Midianite lover, Cozbi is unimaginable though we can well imagine the extreme shock, the immobility of Moses and the Israelites at such display even as they are discussing God’s edict to destroy those who had participated in following the evil practices associated with worshiping the Baal of Peor. The plague was widespread - the despicable behaviour of the Israelites who had succumbed to temptation numbered some 24,000 having fallen away from the Lord. The gravity of the sin called for grievous judgment on the part of the Lord. We’re reminded that being enslaved to sin is a death sentence – ***“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.”*** [Romans 6:16] Yet here we read the whole assembly of Israel is weeping rather than taking action.

Are we to blame for the same fault? Not that I'm advocating picking up spears – but how often are we guilty of endless discussion – committees – analysis – debate - whatever we call it when it is **action** that is called for? Phinehas is commended because he takes action – the right action - to destroy what offends God. Zimri was a blasphemer in the strongest sense. Zimri's sin was a deliberate provocation against God, flaunting and taunting holiness in almost unbelievable crudity. It culminated from the sexual frenzies of the sacrificial feasts of Baal, the surrender to worldly pursuits and lusts rather than holding fast to the Lord and His statutes. These sinners were in essence making the house of God into a bordello and demonstrating complete disregard for the holiness of the Lord. I can't help but consider that the ancients who received dictation for this text were as uncomfortable writing as we are in receiving the message today. It was a brazen act of abandon and is a wakeup call that the Lord does not take lightly the abuse of His compassion and grace.

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Ultimately Phinehas is a foreshadow of Christ the Victor. He is the hand of God extended in rage against the profanation of His joy. His zeal is that of one who fears the Lord, who waits on His mercy, but who also acts when not to act would be to sin.

We see the good news for those zealous for the Lord. The zeal of Phinehas for the honour of the Lord became the occasion for the Lord's covenanting with him and his descendants as God's true priests. It is a reminder, too, that all of us who proclaim God's Son, Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour are, ***"being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*** [1 Pete 2:5] And it is a clarion call that our estimation of the priesthood of God should be enhanced remembering that Christ is the true priest – noble and brave. The best of priestly service points us to Christ. Are we separated from sin and serving Him?

In the midst of all we have read this morning, the turmoil endured by Israel, the slowness of the people to react and the zeal of Phinehas, let us recognize that this scripture celebrates the presence of God in our midst and the great priest – our Priest, Jesus Christ, who comes with action to fight for us with the zeal of a warrior and the heart of a saint to hold us fast to His Father's kingdom. He has promised to keep us from falling into temptation and being led astray into damnation – when you are tempted to be drawn into the wretchedness of the world, remember these words from 1 Corinthians 10:13... ***"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*** We know that we are victors with Christ. We know that we can take a stand and hold fast to the Lord for we do so, not in our strength, but in the mighty strength of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And He does not fail! Amen.

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