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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Joshua 22: 1-34

"The Dangerous Altar"

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TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. We are deep into our study in the Book of Joshua and we're in chapter 22. And rather than read the whole chapter, I'm going to read the first 12 verses, beginning with verse 1,

¹ Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, ² and said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have listened to my voice in all that I commanded you. ³ You have not forsaken your brothers these many days to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. ⁴ And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as He spoke to them; therefore turn now and go to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan. ⁵ Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." ⁶ So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.

⁷ Now to the one half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given *a possession* in Bashan, but to the other half Joshua gave *a possession* among their brothers westward beyond the Jordan. So when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, ⁸ and

said to them, "Return to your tents with great riches and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, iron, and with very many clothes; divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers." ⁹ The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned *home* and departed from the sons of Israel at Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession which they had possessed, according to the command of the LORD through Moses.

¹⁰ When they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance. ¹¹ And the sons of Israel heard *it* said, "Behold, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, on the side *belonging* to the sons of Israel." ¹² When the sons of Israel heard *of it*, the whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh to go up against them in war.

Joshua 22: 1-12

The chapter ends well, but I'm going to stop there. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for this text of Scripture that we will consider this morning. It has many great lessons for us and I pray that You would teach them to us; pray that we would keep Your grace before us, and we would understand that as Your people we're to do, really, as Joshua exhorted those three tribes that would inhabit the other side of the Jordan to do—to love You and to serve You faithfully. We'll do that as we reflect deeply upon who You are and the abundance that You've given us—as You gave all of those tribes abundant gifts and great blessings. So LORD, teach us about Yourself and remind us of the things that we need to do, and how we are to live our lives for You, and live effectively for You—and we can only do that by Your grace. And so LORD, teach us that. Remind us of that. We constantly need to be reminded of who You are and what You've done, what You're doing, and how You will always bless us richly.

Father, we pray for our material needs, as well. We live in this age of the pandemic and we have some among us who are vulnerable, and we pray that You would bless all of us with safety and wisdom—protect us. We pray for strength to endure spiritually and bless us materially, keep us safe. I pray, LORD as well, for the men and women who have jobs and businesses that may be under some strain because of this pandemic. I pray that You'd protect their jobs, protect their businesses, prosper them in the midst of all of it. And may all of us, prosper spiritually through this.

And bless us spiritually now. We will never be blessed spiritually unless we study Your Word, stay in Your Word, and continue to reflect on who You are, and live for You. So help us to do that now, Father, as we turn to our passage after this next hymn. I pray that You would prepare our hearts through it and bless us richly. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Actions always have consequences. Sometimes good. —Sometimes bad. And so there's what we call, or what is called the law of unintended consequences. We've all heard it. Plans are made, but maybe not carefully, and bad things happen—as when a British governor tried to reduce the number of cobras in India by offering money for those who killed them. That made sense, made sense to the people. They saw a profit to be made, but knew that more cobras meant more profit, and so they began breeding them. And the result was the cobra population increased. Good intentions don't always have good results. That, indirectly, is the lesson of Joshua 22 when three tribes of Israel built a large altar that had the potential for consequences far worse than snakes—and almost caused a civil war.

It all begins well. Israel had fought a war for seven years in Canaan—and now that was over. Canaanites remained in the land, but the land was now Israel's possession. Its mission was accomplished. So as happens when wars end, the army was demobilized. That's how chapter 22 begins with 'General' Joshua dismissing his troops. The first group that was to be released was the Trans-Jordan tribes; Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. They had obtained their inheritance, you remember, before the war, before

they, rather, the tribes crossed over the Jordan and took the area of Canaan. That's recorded in Numbers 21, but before that happened, Moses had instructed them that while they possessed their possessions on the east side of the Jordan, they needed to join their brothers in the fight on the west side. And they were willing to do that. They crossed over the Jordan and joined the other tribes in battle.

They had fulfilled their duty, and Joshua now released them with praise. They had been faithful to their promise to Moses and to their brothers in the fight. The LORD had honored their service. He had given the nation rest. And so they could go to their tents in the land of their possession. But Joshua released them with a strong exhortation in verse 5—and that was to obey the LORD, "Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Joshua was as much a shepherd as he was a commander. He cared about the spiritual welfare of his troops—of all the people of Israel. And so he reminded them to observe the Law. But notice the connection between obedience and love. They were to love the LORD and walk in all His ways. And that's always the right order in a relationship. Love guides and motivates good behavior. Obedience is not only outward. Obedience is first of all a condition of the heart. And when we love the LORD, that will bear fruit. It'll bear fruit in true worship, in deeds of kindness. It will bear the fruit of sacrifice for one another.

This is what Moses instructed in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 5, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." 'All your heart, soul, and might'—now that's a command. But think about that. —How do you command love? Well, it has been said by more than one theologian, and said in different ways, but said that biblical ethics, or morality, in that 'the imperative proceeds from the indicative'. Or we could say the 'indicative precedes the imperative'.

Now that may seem academic and grammatical but really it's very simple. The imperative is, as you know, a command. The indicative in grammar is a statement of fact.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son." That is indicative. That is a fact. "Love the LORD with all your heart," that is an imperative. It's a command.

When we understand what the LORD has done for us, we will want to do the things that He's commanded us to do. When we understand what the LORD has done for us at the cross—saved us, made us a new creation, given us a new heart, given us the Holy Spirit—we will know that we can obey. We have the ability, supernatural ability, to do that because we are now a new creation. When we understand what it cost Him to redeem us; gain a new life for us, a new heart, new abilities, to save us from eternal doom, and give us eternal life, and heaven forever—we will want to obey Him.

And, as Israel understood how God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, gave them the promised land, conquered it for them, (and I will add to that), with sending them a Messiah, sending the redeemer, they would want to obey Him. But to understand that, they needed knowledge. They needed teachers of the Law and prophets. That's the reason the LORD placed the Levites and the Levitical cities throughout the land—to teach the people.

So Joshua gave this exhortation, "...Love the LORD your God...walk in His ways...hold fast to Him...serve Him with all your heart..." 'Loving' and 'holding fast' to the LORD go together. Serving is the result of that. When we lack love for the LORD, when our hearts and our love grow cold, there may be service; there may be deeds; there may be a kind of worship, at least a formal worship. —But it, too, is cold. It's cold as our hearts are. It's formal. It's a life that is legalistic. It is outward, it is not inward.

Eventually grace is lost and people begin to see ceremonies and good deeds as meritorious, and it degenerates into a works religion. Israel fell into that just as churches have. So Joshua told the three tribes to 'love the LORD, and hold fast to Him'. The only thing that will keep people from drifting spiritually is a vital relationship with the LORD. And that's why we need to keep reminding ourselves of the indicative—of the things that the LORD has done, of who He is, what He's done, what He's doing, what He's promised to do. Remember the facts that are contained in the Word of God and continually go over them and remember them.

So Joshua reminded them of this, blessed them, and sent them home with a load of treasure. Now that alone reminds them, reminded them of the goodness of God, and the value of faithfulness. He told them to return "...with great riches and with very much livestock, with silver, gold, bronze, iron, and with very many clothes..." (vs8). Gold, silver, the clothes, reminds us of someone. Someone earlier in the book—Achan—at the beginning of the campaign, when he violated the ban at Jericho, and he took from the spoils that were dedicated to the LORD. He saw a Babylonian garment, (must have been a magnificent piece of clothing), a hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold. Think about it. It's tempting. You can understand what tempted him. And he did what he shouldn't have done. He yielded. He took them, As he confessed in chapter 7, "I saw...then I coveted and took." (vs21). He hid the things, but the sin of Achan was discovered, and he lost his life. He lost everything.

Now here at the end of the campaign, some seven years later, the tribes are leaving, having finished their mission. And they were leaving with 'very much silver and gold and clothes'. If he'd waited, Achan would have had all of it. If he had been obedient, if he had been patient, if he had persevered in the mission, he would have had all that he wanted, and much, much more than he stole. Jesus said, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." The eastern tribes did that. They were patient, obedient, and they obtained very much.

Bunyan told a story in *Pilgrim's Progress* about two boys, Passion and Patience. Passion was given a bag of play things, toys and goodies, and things that really a child would love. And he laughed at Patience because Patience didn't have anything. But soon Passion's things were all broken and used up, and he had nothing. But Patience waited for the better things. He didn't waste his time on things that don't last. —And he received the best. He received the permanent.

Patience is difficult, but it has its reward. And the eastern tribes returned home, loaded with riches from God and the strong encouragement from Joshua to share the wealth, at the end of verse 8, "...divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers." About 40,000 soldiers from these Trans-Jordan tribes had fought in Canaan. But other

men remained home to cultivate fields and protect families. They were to have a share in the spoil as well. And it's a situation that presents, that I think must have been to some degree, a temptation for these eastern tribes.

But it's like the crisis that David faced in 1 Samuel, chapter 30, when he and his men pursued the Amalekites who had burned Ziklag, which was the home at that time of David and his men. And they had not only raided the city and taken the possessions of David and his men, but they'd taken their women as well, they were captives. And so 400 men went after the enemy. But 200 were too exhausted to pursue and so they stayed behind to guard the baggage. After the battle, those who fought did not want to share the spoils of victory with those that had guarded. But David objected to that. —He prevented that. He said, "As his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." (vs24).

Some people have a more direct role in the spiritual battle, the spiritual conflict, publicly at least, in the LORD's service. They have more conflict in a kind of obvious way than others. But all play a role. All are in the fight, one way or another. And all are to be blessed for it. And all will be blessed by the LORD.

Well, as we understand that, I think all of us, (and this is true of these tribes), understood the love of the LORD, as He has provided them with so much—has provided us with so much. And when one understands that, I think then it becomes far more natural, in fact, know that it becomes far more natural to give, to sacrifice.

So Joshua sent off his troops, "Like an anxious parent", someone has said, who sees a son or a daughter leave home for college, and has the concern that the separation from them and this new environment may cut them off from the spiritual influences that they want them to have. And in the same way, Joshua sent these men off to their territory beyond the Jordan, separated from the other tribes and the sanctuary. And he did so, no doubt, with concern for their spiritual wellbeing.

He's expressed that in verse 5, but the tribes of Reuben, Dan, and Manasseh shared that concern. They understood the circumstances, the geography of their circumstances. They had that concern. And when they approached the Jordan, before

crossing it, verse 10 states that they built "a large altar" on that west side of the Jordan in the land of Canaan.

The Jordan is not a very large river. But it runs through a deep ravine. In fact, the name Jordan comes from the Hebrew word for 'descend', *Yarden*, or 'go down', because it runs from the hills of Galilee down to the Dead Sea, which is below sea level. In fact, the Dead Sea is the lowest point on the earth. So the descent is steep, and the valley is deep through which it runs, making it a significant barrier between the tribes that could discourage travel from the east to the west and to the sanctuary at Shiloh. And so, understanding that, understanding the difficulties that that river might present for them, they built a big altar on the west side of the Jordan that they could see it from the other side of the Jordan—and it would remind them that they had a part in the altar of Israel.

This was in keeping with policy that we saw earlier in the book, of the tribes crossing the Jordan and building memorials to be a reminder. There's that one that placed the 12 stones in the Jordan river and they placed 12 stones on the side of Canaan to remind them that this was their possession. They built these monuments periodically throughout all of this time of conquest and did so to remind their descendants of what the LORD had done for them: Bringing them out of the desert, bringing them out of Egypt and through the desert and across the Jordan and into the promised land—and then the conquest that followed—it reminded them of the LORD and what He had done. And that's what these three tribes did. It was to remind them of their unity with the western tribes, and the necessity of true worship with them. That was the intent.

But news of the altar traveled quickly, and it was misunderstood to be an act of apostasy, of turning away from the LORD—and almost resulted in war. Verse 12, "When the sons of Israel heard *of it*, the whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh to go up against them in war."

The reason for this response is found in the Book of Deuteronomy. Moses' instruction there in chapter 13, verses 12 through 15, where Moses instructed the people that, if any of their cities said, "Let us go and serve other gods," they were to

utterly destroy that city. Now that's how serious idolatry is, and the reason the tribes were ready to go to war.

Francis Shaeffer, who wrote a nice little commentary on the Book of Joshua wrote, "That is just terrific. We ought to play the bagpipes." Bagpipes were traditionally used to lead the Scots into battle and to scare the enemy. And the reason Dr. Shaeffer applauded their response was that they were being, as he put it, "valiant for truth"—ready to defend it, defend the truth, defend the LORD, and keep worship pure at any cost—even that of fighting old friends. And it is a reminder that the Word of God, and the integrity of the Word of God is more important than compromising it for a friendship. But they were ready to go to war against their brothers, their former comrades in arms.

But—they didn't act in haste. Moses had also said that they were to investigate first. And so they appointed a delegation, led by Phinehas, to do that—and make certain the report that they had heard was true. Phinehas was a wise choice. He was the son of Eleazar, the high priest, and a man who had proven his righteous zeal for the LORD when he had put down apostasy in the camp. It happened at Peor when Midianite women seduced Israelite men. And Phinehas stopped it by slaying an Israelite and the woman that he was with. (It's found in Numbers 25.) He was the great defender of the faith—and he led the delegation of 10 princes to the land of Gilead. (Jos 23:13-14).

When they arrived, they asked them, 'What they had done? Why had they rebelled against the LORD by building this altar?' (vs15&16). Well, they reminded these three tribes in verse 17 of the previous apostasy, "the iniquity of Peor", to remind them of the plague that it brought on Israel, one that was only stopped when Phinehas took the action that he did—and that their act in building an altar would provoke the LORD's anger against the whole nation.

In verse 20 they remind them of Achan and his unfaithfulness, and how the sin of that one individual affected the whole congregation—it led to the defeat at the battle of Ai. The sin of Peor was a corporate sin. It involved a number of Israelites. Achan's sin, though, was an individual sin. But both resulted in the congregation suffering greatly.

Sin, even in one person, is dangerous. It is contagious. It permeates the congregation. Paul understood that. He speaks of that in 1 Corinthians 5, verse 6. There was sin in the church at Corinth, and he tells them they had to deal with that—and then speaks about the danger of “a little leaven” leavening the whole lump. ‘Get rid of the leaven.’ That's what takes place at Passover when they remove all the leaven from the house and Paul uses that as his illustration.

Well they warned them, this delegation did, of that very problem, that they put the nation in jeopardy of judgment. But they made a generous offer in verse 19, "If, however, the land of your possession is unclean, then cross into the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD, or rebel against us by building an altar for yourselves, besides the altar of the LORD our God."

These were men seeking to avoid war—and to avoid the LORD's discipline as well. That's part of what it means to fear the LORD. It means to recognize that sin results in divine correction, (which is not pleasant). Now that's true today of the church. Acts chapter 5, gives the case of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Spirit. Consequence was, both died. Luke wrote, "...great fear came upon the whole church..." (vs11), and rightly so.

Now our highest motivation for obedience, (and what I stress somewhat in this passage), is not fear of discipline, but love for the LORD, and loyalty to the truth. But fear of discipline is wise because God will deal with His children severely if necessary. Read Revelation chapters 2 and 3. And Israel showed wisdom here, and devotion to the truth, and righteousness.

But the people also showed what Francis Shaeffer called “the practicality of love”. They were ready to make a big sacrifice for these three tribes and share their inheritance with them in order to preserve unity and preserve purity. It's similar to what the early church did in Jerusalem when Christians shared what they had with one another and had “all things in common”. (Act 2:44). It wasn't forced upon them. It wasn't some improper political system that is exhibited there. This is something they did because

they wanted to do it. They loved one another and they shared where they saw needs. Here we see that same kind of spirit.

Now that offer was not only generous, it was smart. Proverbs 25 verse 15 says, "A soft tongue breaks the bone." A gentle, kind response is powerful. It helps avoid conflict. And it did here. These eastern tribes could have taken offense at the charge that was made against them and responded in anger and stormed off to their tents. They didn't do that. And I think that the proposal here, helped to quiet them. They were righteous men also, showed concern over the matter, and recognized or explained that it was a misunderstanding. And they answered this charge very solemnly in verses 22 and 23.— They invoked God as their witness.

It's very interesting how they do that. They do it twice, and they do it with three names of God. I don't know we can make too much of that, but in a court of law, the Law said two or more witnesses must be used. And here they used the LORD, and three names of the LORD to do it twice, to give witness twice. We read in verse 22, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, the Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows, and may Israel itself know. If *it was* in rebellion, or if an unfaithful act against the LORD, (*that is this altar, was unfaithful*), do not save us this day!" In other words, 'We will submit to judgment if we are guilty of what you said.'

Then they explained the reason for the altar. It wasn't an act of apostasy—it was just the opposite. It was because the Jordan separated them and they feared the separation would result in the western tribes cutting off the eastern tribes from the LORD. Verse 24 & 25, "But truly we have done this out of concern, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your sons may say to our sons, "What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between us and you, *you* sons of Reuben and sons of Gad; you have no portion in the LORD." So your sons may make our sons stop fearing the LORD.' "

So idolatry wasn't the motive for the altar. Just the opposite. Love for the LORD and the desire to protect their children from faithlessness—protect their children from idolatry was the reason they built it. It wasn't built as a rival shrine. It wasn't built for

sacrifice. It was built to be "a witness", (that's what they call it in verse 27), between the tribes, both tribes on either side of the Jordan.

And then they repudiate any evil motive, verse 29, "Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD and turn away from following the LORD this day, by building an altar for burnt offering, for grain offering or for sacrifice, besides the altar of the LORD our God which is before His tabernacle." So, their reasons for building the altar were good, 'Their heart was in the right place', as we say. We can't question that. They showed genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of their children.

What we can question, though, is their wisdom in not consulting the other tribes before building that altar. And we can question the need for such an altar. It's not as though the LORD has left them ill-prepared. They had the instruction of the Word of God and they had Levitical cities nearby where that instruction could be given. In the Law, the command is given that all male Israelites are to appear at the Sanctuary three times a year and obeying that would maintain the unity that they wanted to preserve.

Also, the LORD had not instructed them to build the altar. They did have some precedent for it, as we've noted with these memorials that had been built earlier at Jordan—they were for 'a witness'. But this one had definite religious form, and could possibly been adapted to a religious function, or become a shrine, which made it an altar of potential danger with unintended consequences. That happens.

The bronze serpent that Moses made and was the means of healing those people who the fiery serpents had bitten in the wilderness—that was kept by the Israelites and it was valued by them. And you can understand why. It was a good thing and it had been the means of great blessing. In fact, God prescribed it. Why wouldn't they keep it? But it became an idol later in Israel's history. It was called "Nehushtan", which means 'piece of bronze'. And so this thing became a kind of idol. It was Hezekiah, King Hezekiah, who led a great reform in Israel, and when he did, he broke it to pieces—destroyed it—because the Israelites were burning incense to it. It was 'good' but it became a problem—a stumbling block for the people.

And that sometimes happens when innovations in worship are introduced. They may have been developed to instruct, or to guard against error, and to promote worship. But they can lead, as we said earlier, to formalism—to routine, lifeless worship that becomes ritualistic and spiritually dead. So, while the altar that the eastern tribes built never became a problem for them, the concern of the other tribes had merit. It had the potential of becoming a problem. And it was unnecessary. God had not failed to provide sufficiently for any of the tribes of Israel. Faithfulness to His Word was all that was necessary. And it's all that's necessary for us today.

It's interesting to note, (I think it's significant), the emphasis of the Bible is on 'hearing', not 'seeing'. There is a lot of emphasis on 'seeing' and 'ritual' and all in the Old Testament and Israel's religion. But in the New Testament it's very different from that. The emphasis is on hearing. —But men like seeing. They like objects and pageants and ceremonies and things of beauty. —That's just human nature. So, many churches, good churches, go for liturgy; they go for repeating creeds, in a dignified way. The substance of it is often good, but it can lead to a kind of formalism—a mindless, empty ritual. That's a danger. I'm not intending to criticize any of those churches for that, any more than I'm criticizing this altar. But there is a danger—unintended consequences—even with helpful things when they are not prescribed by the Bible.

The essence of the spiritual life is given by Joshua in verse 5, and it's not ceremonies. It's, "Love the LORD your God...and hold fast to Him." Then, and only then, will we obey and serve Him with all our heart.

And what that requires is what we already have—and that is the Word of God. That is its emphasis—'hearing' it—hearing God's Word—that's Romans chapter 10, verse 17, "Faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." That is what the Holy Spirit uses to nourish our souls and to give us spiritual growth—to give us understanding; to give us wisdom and maturity. And it requires effort on our part. It requires consistent reading and study of Scripture. If we neglect that we suffer. We need to be hearing the Word of God in our heart. And as we study Scripture, we discover that, provision for the church; for its worship, for its government, for our instruction, for

discipline—provision for that is complete and simple. We don't need to improve on it, just follow it.

Now because the western tribes went to the three eastern tribes, spoke to them, investigated the matter, the whole incident ended happily, with Phinehas saying, "Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this unfaithful act against the LORD; now you have delivered the sons of Israel from the hand of the LORD." (vs31), (*that is, delivered us from discipline.*)

Following that, Phinehas and the princes with him returned to Canaan to give their report. It was well received. The chapter ends beginning with verse 33, "The word pleased the sons of Israel, and the sons of Israel blessed God; and they did not speak of going up against them in war to destroy the land in which the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad were living. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar *Witness*; 'For', *they said*, 'it is a witness between us that the LORD is God.' "

The lessons for us in all of this, I think, are, first of all, don't make rash decisions. —Investigate a matter before making a judgment. Second, guard the truth, defend the faith. We must be equipped and ready to do that. In the words of Jude, "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (vs3). We're all to be doing that, and equipping ourselves to do that—to know the Word of God and to be able to defend the faith.

The third lesson, by implication at least, is, be cautious and biblical. Remember the law of unintended consequences. We may think we have a new and a better way of doing things. But beware. Programs may be introduced for a good reason—maybe to promote growth in the congregation to increase attendance—but they may end up increasing the population of snakes/cobras. The best path is follow the Word of God.

That is true for a church. Christ is the head of the church. We should always look to Him. And how do we do that? We do it in two ways. We do it in prayer, and we do it in study. Pray—He hears—He answers. And follow His Word. That's the way for personal

growth for each one of us. It leads to love for the LORD, which results in obedience and service. And service results in great reward. Not necessarily in this life. In fact, in this life we may be tested severely—and we may lose much. Those Christians to whom the author of Hebrews wrote had lost possessions and had lost freedom—and that may happen to us some day. We may even face the stake as many martyrs have. But, that itself has its great reward—not here, but in the world to come.

And I think that's pictured in these tribes, going back to their inheritance with great riches that were shared with those who worked while they fought. And that's where our wealth is. It's in the inheritance that we have—the future—the kingdom to come. It's what Christ spoke of in Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 through 21, 'Don't store up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy. But store up treasures in heaven, where they're safe, where we have them for all eternity.' Don't live for time, live for eternity.

So how are you living? What are you living for? Are you living for the LORD and for eternity? Now that's a question that we all need to be asking ourselves, and asking ourselves continually.

But there's another question that needs to be asked, 'Do you know the LORD?' If not, you are lost. You are guilty. "All have sinned", Paul reminds us. Be forgiven. Be found. Come to Christ. He's the Savior who died for sinners. He receives all who trust in Him. So believe and be saved. God help you to do that.

And help all of us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this great text of Scripture. It's full of lessons for us. Certainly, we are reminded what is chief, what is most important by the instruction that Joshua gave to those three tribes as they left, "Love the LORD your God. Walk in His ways. Hold fast to Him."

LORD, we will do that only by Your grace. So LORD, we pray for that grace and mercy for each one of us. Give us a profound love for You. To have that, though, we must be learning about You, reading Your Word, studying it, seriously. So enable us to do that. Draw us close to Yourself. And in so doing, give us fruitful lives that are a blessing to those around us, a blessing to ourselves, and most importantly, a blessing to You. We pray these things in Christ's name, LORD.

And as we do we ask You to prepare our hearts for this time of worship as we take the LORD's Supper. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)