

Rumblings of Division
Joshua 22:10-34, John 4:19-26
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Throughout Joshua, hope meets disappointment. Here, the day the conquest is completed there is a threat of civil war. We share with ancient Israel the experience of 'already but not yet.' At the heart of the 'not yet' is the fact that we have not yet learned to worship God purely.

I) Purity of worship matters to God

A) Israel models this

1) The Israelites west of the Jordan

- v. 12: *When they heard of [the Altar], they gathered to make war...*
- v. 19: *...if the land of your possession is unclean, take for yourselves a possession among us*

2) The explanation given by the Israelites east of the Jordan

- v. 22: *The mighty One, God, the LORD...do not spare us today for building an altar to turn away from following the LORD*
- No intention of unfaithfulness

B) Meaning for us

- What worship looks like has changed (John 4:21, 23-24)
- But the principle remains
- The challenge:
 - How much are we like Phinehas et al?
 - How much are we like Reuben et al?

II) Why does purity of worship matter so much?

A) Because God is a person

- v. 16: *...what is this breach of faith...against the God of Israel*

B) Because worship is what binds us to each other most deeply

III) What does pure worship look like?

- v. 28: *Behold the copy...not for sacrifice...*
- Coming through the Son

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) What two things were Phinehas et al prepared to do when they got word that the three tribes east of the Jordan had built a rival altar near the Jordan? Why were they prepared to do this?
- 2) Phinehas speaks of the crimes at Peor (Numbers 25:1-9) and of Achan (Joshua 7). What were the crimes, what were the results of them, and what was done to address them?
- 3) Paraphrase the explanation that Reuben et al give for their rival altar.
- 4) Compare yourself to Phinehas et al (esp. v. 19). How much of a hit are you willing to take to ensure that a fellow Christian isn't drifting away from the Lord?
- 5) What troubled Reuben most deeply was the thought that the church of the future might not receive his kids. Is this what concerns you most deeply about your kids, or the kids of our church—that the church they encounter when they are adults will not receive them because they will give no evidence that they belong?
- 6) Having our children grow into nice and successful people is not nearly as important as having them grow into people who love God from the heart. How do your present practice and concerns reveal this priority?
- 7) What is the connection in Reuben's mind between the proper worship of God and peace among the Israelites? Is it true, do you think, that all social peace depends in the end upon people being at peace with God? If you think so, then how do you respond to those voices in our day who say that religion is precisely the reason why there is so much social division?
- 8) Reflect on the following: "We worship God rightly only when we come to him in the ways and by the means that he has appointed. For ancient Israel this meant coming to him only through the temple worship. For us it means coming to him only through Jesus."