

God's Twelve Step Program to Righteousness

Drash on Parashah 7; Vayetze

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This is a re-telling of a lesson I did on how the twelve sons of Isra'el show the history of the nation of Isra'el. So if parts of this seem familiar, then I know you were not sleeping through the original lesson, which is good. I am re-telling this lesson, but with a different focus. I believe all Believers are citizens of Biblical Isra'el, which exists only spiritually today. As such, the history of Isra'el relates to us as Believers today, because of the whole phrespit concept. (physical representation of spiritual truth)

Whether we are a Believer or Unbeliever, we all wrestle with sin. The Unbeliever is a slave to it, and the Believer is enticed by it in the same way Ya'akov was enticed by Rachel in such a way as to be blinded to the will of God, which was Leah. We face temptations of all kinds every day. Just as God made a nation from one man, He can do mighty things through you, and the roadmap is spelled out for us through the twelve sons of Isra'el.

Re'uven

The name Re'uven means, "behold a son". He is the first of his family and the start of the next generation. He was the beginning of the twelve tribes of Isra'el. In saying, "behold a son", God was declaring the beginning of His Kingdom manifested on earth through a human kingdom, a nation of people who would be His people, and He their God. Here, with this man, Isra'el as a nation was born.

"But as many as did receive him, to those who put their trust in his person and power, he gave the right to become children of God, not because of bloodline, physical impulse or human intention, but because of God." (John 1:12-13)

Freedom from sin begins with the decision to be a child of God. Faith in the Son, Yeshua the Messiah, makes us such a child. We must work to turn our back on sin and turn toward God. Re'uven was the beginning of a journey that the nation of Isra'el is still living out, along with all those who have been engrafted in with them. When we make that decision to follow in the footsteps of Messiah, that is our Re'uven moment. What we need to realize, however, that is only the beginning.

Shim'on

"Sh'ma, Yisra'el! Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad [Hear, Isra'el! Adonai our God, Adonai is one] [D'varim/Deuteronomy 6:4]

Shim'on means, "heard". It comes from a root word, shema, which means, "to hear". Prayer is about communicating with God, however, it is more about listening to God than talking to Him. As important as praise and petition is, it is far more important for God's people to listen to His instructions as well as His words of encouragement. In the Kingdom of God, God is King. His word is above any other. In order to be a citizen of the Kingdom, hearing and obeying God is vital.

The words following the Shema consist of God's instructions to follow His commands in everything they do. Getting away from sin requires us knowing that God has a plan for each of us, way bigger than we are or what we can do ourselves. His plan is greater than anything sin has to offer us. However, we will never know God's will if we are not listening to His voice.

Levi

*"Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart."
(Exodus 19:5-6)*

Shim'on and Levi are considered brothers in B' resheet/Genesis 49:5. Of course all twelve are brothers, but these two are linked in a more unique way than the other ten. They were violent and had killed many together. Levi means, "to be joined". As we listen to God, we become joined to Him, just as the disciples of Yeshua were joined to Emmanuel, or "God with us", as they listened to His teaching and instruction.

It is out of those who were joined with God, that the priests of the tabernacle came out of. It was the tribe of Levi that had the responsibility and privilege to be the spiritual leaders of Isra'el. They were servants of both God and Man. This is another key to freedom from sin. We are either a slave of sin or of righteousness. As we learn to serve the King, the bonds of sin are broken. As we turn on the light the darkness disappears. In all we do, we must seek to draw closer to God and join Him in the work He is doing in our world.

Y'hudah

Y'hudah means, "praised", and there is no better time for God to be praised than when He delivers you from your enemies and gives you victory over His. Pagan nations and wicked people are not the only enemies of God and His people. Sin is another enemy, which separates God from His people. It is no accident that the Messiah would later come from the tribe of Y'hudah. Messiah Yeshua paid the final sacrifice for sin, to provide a way for all God's people, both Jew and Gentile to conquer sin, enter the "land" God has promised for them, and ultimately give praise to the One who brought such victory.

Upon seeing him, the people praised their god: "Our god has handed over to us our enemy, who destroyed our land and killed so many of us." [Shoftim/Judges 16:24]

Our life ought to be lived in praise to God as our King and rescuer from the sin of our lives. On our own, we can do nothing.

Z'vulun

"From this all the peoples of the earth can know that the hand of Adonai is strong, and you can fear Adonai your God forever." (Y'hoshua/Joshua 4:24)

As God brought His people into the Promised Land, He fought on behalf of Isra'el, but was also fighting on behalf of His own holiness. The paganism of the people living in the land of Kena'an made them the enemies of God. Their destruction was God's honor. Z'vulun means, "exalted". God displayed His power as judge and king over the land He called His own. He showed Himself to be the supreme ruler over the land and the gods of the people living there. He had already displayed His power in Egypt with the ten plagues and the Exodus. Now He displays His power again to pave the way for His people to enter the Promised Land.

We have to know that God is a holy God, and will accomplish His will with or without us. Our choice is what side of God's will we are going to be on. To live in sin, we make ourselves the enemy of God. To pursue righteousness puts us in His grace.

Yissachar

Yissakhar means, "there shall be recompense". The picture here is the same as receiving a fair wage or compensation for a day's work. God had done much on behalf of Isra'el, and brought them to the land promised to their forefathers. God had done what He said He would do, now it was time to give back to God the worship and devotion due Him for His faithfulness.

He brought me up from the roaring pit, up from the muddy ooze, and set my feet on a rock, making my footing firm. [Tehellim/Psalms 40:2]

We serve and worship God because of what He has done for us. If you have a heartbeat, you have reason to be thankful and live according to that thankfulness. We not only love God because of His love for us, but part of that love includes loving others. God has given us an example to pass on to others He brings into our lives.

Dan

"When Adonai raised up judges for them, Adonai was with the judge and delivered them from the hands of their enemies throughout the lifetime of the judge; for Adonai was moved to pity by their groaning under those oppressing and crushing them. But after the judge died, they would

relapse into worse behavior than that of their ancestors, following other gods to serve and worship them; they abandoned none of their practices or stubborn ways.” (Judges 2:18-19)

You might guess, that Dan means, “judge” and you would be right. Notice that in the book of Judges, it was always when Isra'el was in a state of sin and oppression that a judge was appointed to rescue them. Normally, when a person commits a crime, they go before a judge, who evaluates their guilt and assesses a penalty for their crime. A person does not go to a judge to rescue them from the consequences of the crime. It would seem that it would be a judge that would put Isra'el into bondage for their sin, not take them out of it.

The reason why this seems to be a problem is that we think of a judge based on our modern cultural concept of the court system and what a judge does today. However, the use for judge is different in the Bible. Here a judge acted more like a defense attorney, and the real judge is the Judge of the universe, God. Today, if you commit a crime, even if you are clearly guilty, you still go to a defense attorney who will plead with the judge and/or the jury to explain how and why you committed the crime in an attempt to get a lesser sentence or no sentence at all. At the same time, the lawyer is going to use his or her knowledge of the law and the court system to teach you what you need to do to help yourself gain favor with the judge and jury. This is exactly what the judges of Isra'el did.

Our job as God's people is not to be a judge, but to lead others to the Judge. God does not bring us out of sin, so that we can be prideful about our righteousness. This in itself would be sin. No one is perfect, no matter how you might try. As each of us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, we must help others to do the same.

Gad

Gad means, “troop”. A troop in Scripture implies an entire army. When you join the Kingdom, you join an army. Failure to battle the enemy leads to sure destruction. God does not need Rambos, neither does He need cowards or deserters. He needs warriors who are strong, wise, connected to a troop of warriors, and willing to fight for the truth and love of God. He needs men and women of integrity and courage who through their own blood, sweat, and tears will build the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven according to the design of God found in His Word.

Use all the armor and weaponry that God provides, so that you will be able to stand against the deceptive tactics of the Adversary. [Ephesians 6:11]

Here we engage in spiritual warfare. The Adversary is just as real as God, and the one who wishes to escape sin has to learn to see life on a physical and spiritual level. There are spiritual connections to things that on the surface might seem innocent. We must walk in the light as our Messiah is in the light, and remain united with Him, if we are to defeat the powers of darkness that seek to destroy us.

Asher

"How happy your people must be, how happy these servants of yours who are always here attending you and get to hear your wisdom! Blessed be Adonai your God, who took pleasure in you to put you on his throne, so that you could be king for Adonai your God. Because of your God's love for Isra'el, to establish them forever, he has made you king over them, to administer law and judgment." (2 Chronicles 9:7-8)

Asher means, "happy", and true happiness and peace comes from the Spirit of God, which dwells within each believer. It is not based on that which is outward, but the Spirit that dwells within. Some of the poorest and most oppressed people in the world are also the most joyful and at peace with the world. Such people have learned to look within for such comfort. Pleasure and wealth are not wrong. They are blessings from the hand of God, but they are also resources to be used for the glory of God, not Man. It is important that in the joy of life, we do not allow the objects of prosperity to get in the way of our devotion to God.

When God liberates us from sin, this is a good thing. This ought to create great joy within us, and in fact joy is commanded in Scripture. It is the joy which comes from within which allows us to praise God in the good times as well as the bad.

Naftali

We have to know that a relationship with God will not always be easy. He blesses His servants, but also tests their faith in order to help them to grow. There will be times when God allows things to happen in our lives that do not make sense and seem that He is not there. No matter what, He is always our King and deserves our service and love. At times, our relationship with God requires wrestling.

Naftali is about, "wrestling". Muscles strengthen as they are worked. Lack of resistance brings atrophy. Wrestling with God's Word involves seeking understanding and bending oneself to the will and authority of God. Performing God's will is often not easy, and we must wrestle with our own sinful desires while seeking to yield to those of righteousness. As long as our eyes remain on God, ultimately, truth will win and break the bonds of sin.

Then some man wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he did not defeat Ya`akov, he struck Ya`akov's hip socket, so that his hip was dislocated while wrestling with him. The man said, "Let me go, because it's daybreak." But Ya`akov replied, "I won't let you go unless you bless me." The man asked, "What is your name?" and he answered, "Ya`akov." Then the man said, "From now on, you will no longer be called Ya`akov, but Isra'el; because you have shown your strength to both God and men and have prevailed." [B'resheet/Genesis 32:24-28]

Yoseph

Yoseph did not conquer his brothers, he saved them. Yeshua does not cancel out everything the other brothers of Yoseph represents, he adds to them to bridge the gap between human effort to reach God, and God's desire for them to be holy, so that they can. Yeshua was Jewish, He was a Torah observant Man from the tribe of Yehudah, descended from King David, yet also the Son of God. In this way, God's promise that Isra'el would be a blessing to all nations is at least partially fulfilled in Yeshua. Yeshua would also bring an increase to the Kingdom of God. At this point, God's Kingdom is no longer manifested in Isra'el, which no longer exists as the nation it was intended to be. There are no twelve tribes, no temple, no priesthood, and there are pagans living in the land, even on the temple mount. The Kingdom exists today spiritually through faith in Yeshua, and by living a Torah observant lifestyle. Just as Yeshua brings an increase to the Kingdom through His sacrifice, the people of God today have the calling to increase the Kingdom by being a light in a dark world, and leading others, both Jew and Gentile to the Kingdom of Yeshua.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to Adonai to serve him, to love the name of Adonai, and to keep Shabbat and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”
(Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 56:6-7)

Yoseph was not the leader of any tribe of Israel, but his two sons, born of a Gentile woman, were half tribes. However, Yoseph, which means “increase”, not only saved Israel, but added to it. We are not saved from sin to keep God's gift to ourselves, but to reach out to lead others to that same gift.

Efrayim & M'nasheh

Isra'el rejected God. Even before Messiah, much hypocrisy, corruption, and division existed within Isra'el. Rejecting Yeshua as the Messiah was just the final straw. With Isra'el's rejection, God turned His focus on the Gentiles. He has not given up on the Jews, in fact, it is His purpose to use the gentiles to eventually turn Jewish people back to Himself, and to faith in His Son as Messiah. When this happens Efrayim, which means “double portion”, and M'nasheh, which means, “to forget”, will reunite as brothers in the one Kingdom with Yeshua and King as High Priest over both of them. Efrayim is not the Gentiles, and the Gentile believers are not Isra'el. Rather, Efrayim represents the Gentiles as they are the double portion, added to Isra'el, to lead those Jews who have forgotten God, represented by M'nasheh, back to their position as the children of God.

For in union with the Messiah, you are all children of God through this trusting faithfulness; because as many of you as were immersed into the Messiah have clothed yourselves

with the Messiah, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female; for in union with the Messiah Yeshua, you are all one. [Galatians 3:26-28]

Binyamin

"He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God." [1 Kefa/1 Peter 3:22]

Yeshua is the One who sits at the right hand of honor of His Father who dwells in the heavenly Kingdom. Binyamin is, "the son of the right hand." Some time in the future, Yeshua as Messiah will return as Messiah ben David, the conquering king, wipe out sin from the face of the earth, build His Kingdom, and reign in a New Jerusalem for all eternity.

As we turn from sin and pursue righteousness, it is important for us to see the end of the story. This is what Revelations does for us. Regardless of your eschatology, one thing that is clear is that in the end, God wins. That is all we need to know. The choice is ours. We can continue to live in sin and suffer the fate of God's enemies, or serve God and live with him for eternity. If we choose the first, he will demand that we depart from Him for He does not know us. If we choose the second, we will hear Him say, "Behold, a son."