

"Actions Need to Follow Understanding"

1 Chronicles 12:23-40

As 2020 ended, there were numerous articles, blogs and videos that retraced the good and bad of 2020. One article from Christianity Today caught my eye and it was entitled, "12 Leaders Evangelicals Lost in 2020". J. I. Packer and Ravi Zacharias were the most notable but the one that caught my eye was Francis Anderson. Now, I know there's not a soul listening to this who knew who Francis Anderson was. Francis Anderson was an Australian Hebrew Scholar who wrote many books, articles and commentaries on the Old Testament but also on the biblical Hebrew language. He was ahead of his time. Back in the 1970's when no one had a personal computer, he began compiling a linguistic database of all biblical Hebrew words and would break the words down in the different way they were used.

Now, as excited as I know most of you are about Hebrew, he was especially so. His love for the Bible's intricate language helped him realize how amazing God is. He wrote a commentary on the book of Job and said this of God:

[Job] is so full of the awesome reality of a living God [that] Like Job, one can only put one's hand over one's mouth (40:4) [because] God has revealed himself, preserving at the same time the inaccessible mystery of his own being ... However forbidding, he fascinates us irresistibly until, by 'kindness and severity' (Rom. 11:22), he brings us in his own way to Job's final satisfaction and joy.

For Dr. Anderson, the more he studied God's word, the more God changed him. That's the whole point of studying the Bible. Not to master the knowledge of it, but to be mastered by God Himself, and applying His Word so that He makes us more like His Son. If the Word of God is not doing that for you and me, our heart is not right.

As we begin 2021 I want to start in an unexciting part of the Hebrew Bible, 1 Chron. 12. If you've ever read 1 Chronicles, you know the first 11 chapters, you know its like walking through a desert. It seems like there's nothing there. Some parts of the Bible are not exciting, nor are they meant to be. They are meant to provide information. A genealogy tells you how we got from this person over here and that situation to this person over here, always with the purpose of tracing one of God's promises.

1 Chron. 1-11 tells you how God orchestrated people and places from Adam all the way to Saul and David. God had a promise to fulfill to make David king but Saul was in the way. And in his death he left a divided nation. Ch. 12:1-22 shows that even during Saul's reign many people were siding with David. David hid from Saul, raised his own band of followers around him and was involved in many smaller battles. He waited patiently on God to fulfill the promise God made through Samuel that David would rule over Israel one day.

1 Chronicles 12 lines up historically with 2 Sam. 5, when after Saul's death, the nation of Israel worked together to make David king over the whole nation. At this point he was only king over south of Jerusalem in Hebron. Vv. 23-40 contain an unexciting list of all the men equipped for battle from each tribe who were willing to join David's cause because they believed in God's Word. When we read lists we watch for what's repeated but also what's unique. And in this list we read a change in v.32,

men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command;

To some degree this applies to all Israel but there are some specific points to make about the tribe of Issachar. The people of Issachar

Knew God's Word and Sought to Live it Out **(12:23-40)**

That's what God desires for all His people, you and I included. Knowledge of the Bible should change us more to be like Jesus. The men of Issachar understood the times and what the nation should do. Understanding of God's truth leads to doing, applying the Word. What was the specific word from God they understood? V.23

²³ *These are the numbers of the men armed for battle who came to David at Hebron to turn Saul's kingdom over to him, as the LORD had said:*

"As the Lord had said". When did God say David would be king? Way back in 1 Sam. 16 (we looked at this during one of our Bethlehem messages in December). Samuel visits Bethlehem in obedience to God because God said my new king is there, one whose heart seeks after me. Jesse parades his 7 sons past Samuel, none of whom God affirms. Are there more sons? Just the red head kid looking after the sheep. Turns out he's the one. But that was almost 20 years ago! Is God's Word still true? Better believe it and act like it is. So what did that imply that the men of Issachar understood the times [need for Israel to be united under one king, David] and what they needed to do about it? Do you see what knowing God's word should do to us? I learn what God says, now I need to ask 'What am I going to do about this? How will it change me? What action do I need to take?' For the tribe of Issachar and all other 11 tribes it meant,

Willingly Serving Under God's Direction **(v.23, 31, 38)**

If God appointed a King over Israel that means they must be willing to serve him, trusting that he will follow God. This is the pattern of Scripture. We voluntarily place ourselves under others in service so we can follow God together. Our sinful nature often raises its ugly head and once in a while we say 'No. I'm not willing to serve another. I don't need to serve anyone.' Whether its rejecting authority in our home, church or society, rebellion always leads to separation. This is what life was like under Saul. The men of Issachar understood that wasn't beneficial for all God's people. They needed to come together. God's word said David will be king. They had to choose whether they would serve him or not. What did that mean?

If you look at the list it's mostly about military. It's anticipating that if we're going to live out the Word of God then there's going to be a battle between David's supporters and Saul's supporters. So we're told all about the military skills of each tribe and how much of an army they could put together. Any time we seek to apply the Word of God, we need to be

Prepared to count the cost and stand up for the Lord **(vv.23-27)**

This wasn't just a war, it was a stance to believe what God said. And for Israel at the time it would involve physical warfare. How does that apply to us? If you and I understand from God's Word that each of us in our own spheres of influence are expected to make disciples then we need to be spiritually prepared for the battle for lost souls; because the enemy will be ready for us. If we know we are to lead our families in the Lord and we announce to our families we're going to church or reading the Bible or making better screen choices then we can expect the enemy to show up and cause conflict. If we know we're going into an environment where God's existence is mocked, then we need to be prepared spiritually and be willing to count the cost when we speak up for the Lord. The men of Israel would do battle with the supporters of Saul. Some would get wounded, some even lose their lives. There's always a cost to standing up for the truth.

Each tribe, like Issachar, had to decide for themselves whether they believed God's Word and they would side with David or Saul or stay out of it. Sadly, choosing to avoid conflict would still result in conflict. Because they were Israelites they were under the rule of whoever was the king. So to choose avoidance was not a choice. Same here. When we choose purposely to avoid the inevitable need to confront untruths in our lives and in the lives of those around us, it just delays conflict. It actually will make it worse because resolution is still needed. Avoidance of confrontation is a ticking time bomb. Deal with it before it blows up in your face or you explode and say things you regret.

The specific phrase "understood the times and knew what Israel should do" means they had

Spiritual Discernment to Know When to Act **(v.32)**

The chapter began talking about how over the years while Saul was alive, many individual Israelites had defected from following Saul to following David. Some of them were from Saul's tribe – Benjamin (v.2). Some were even from Saul's home town, Gibeah (v.3). Even though David himself had a couple of chances to kill Saul, he understood it wasn't the time nor was that the way. He knew it had to be God's way in God's time. Saul's disobedience to God resulted in his loss in battle to the Philistines. He lost 3 sons in that battle and was wounded himself. Realizing the time of his death was closing in, he asked his armour bearer to end his life. He refused to do such a thing, so Saul did it to himself. God allowed Saul to take himself out of the picture.

Now Israel was defeated and divided. Who could pull them together? The 12 tribes realized now was the time to unite the nation under David, God's choice for king. While there were still many loyal to Saul, the sons of Issachar "understood the times". They realized now was the right time to fulfil God's Word to Israel and rallied together their fighting men to join in the cause to unite the people of God. David was God's choice. David was experienced at defeating Philistines. If the tribe of Issachar – and any tribe – wanted peace and security then they had to do their part and work together to accomplish God's purposes.

"They knew what to do". When God makes us aware through His Word or Spirit what we need to do, that's when we need to do it. James wrote in James 4:17

¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

The sons of Issachar joined their brothers, knowing it might cost them their lives, in order to accomplish the will of God according to His Word to David. This is what wisdom is. To act on the revealed knowledge of God. Discernment is to know when and how to act. Discernment is something we learn from God as we rely on His Spirit over time making decisions that accomplish His purpose.

These will not be easy decisions. Discernment means we have to think, pray and ask for God's direction trusting His leading that we are one with him. What helped the men of Issachar. The unity of the others. Even, some of the Benjamites, Saul's own tribe.

Not to have acted yet knowing what they ought to do, would have been disobedience and created more division. Good questions to ask ourselves when discerning God's will is;

- Am I saying no because that's what I want?
- What will glorify God the most?
- Who will benefit from this?
- Am I willing to make sacrifices for God and others?

And the men of Issachar, as did each tribe, also

Understood their Role to Unify the People of God **(vv.33, 38-40)**

There's another phrase that's repeated in the lists of tribes and that's in v.33 about Zebulun and v.38 of everyone. In v.33 we read of the tribe of Zebulun,

³³ *men of Zebulun, experienced soldiers prepared for battle with every type of weapon, to help David with undivided loyalty—50,000;*

And the chapter concludes in v.38-40 saying of everyone,

³⁸ *All these were fighting men who volunteered to serve in the ranks. They came to Hebron fully determined to make David king over all Israel. All the rest of the Israelites were also of one mind to make David king.* ³⁹ *The men spent three days there with David, eating and drinking, for their families had supplied provisions for them.* ⁴⁰ *Also, their neighbors from as far away as Issachar, Zebulun and Naphtali came bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules and oxen. There were plentiful supplies of flour, fig cakes, raisin cakes, wine, oil, cattle and sheep, for there was joy in Israel.*

"undivided loyalty" of v.33 in Hebrew is literally, 'heart of hearts'.

"fully determined" of v.38 in Hebrew is literally 'shalom/whole heart'

"one mind" of v.38 in Hebrew is literally 'one heart'.

The Hebrew for mind and heart is the same word 'lav'. The two are inseparable. 'Whole heart' is shalom heart. Shalom means complete, whole. It's the word that describes or prays for your whole life to be right with God, right with people and have all your needs met. The people of God were of one heart/mind to make David their king, being willing to serve under him as he served under God. They sensed God would meet their needs and bring shalom to the nation at this time. And they had a party to celebrate. And the tribe of Issachar is mentioned again as coming from far away to bring food and animals that were necessary for equipping the army for the battle ahead.

As we move into 2021 we need to pray for the shalom of the world. That people would find true peace with God through faith in Jesus and find their hearts satisfied through Him. If we understand our times, we also understand that the world is strangely united through the Covid virus. It's affected everyone, everywhere. Now would be an ideal time for a charismatic leader to come on the scene

offering false promises of hope and security for a world desperately wanting it. But we have the true message of hope in Jesus. And more than ever we have to stay united as God's people to show a virus can't knock us down. To show we are of one heart to bring the gospel to our communities and to the world through the missionaries we support.

The people of Issachar understood they had an important part to play in helping God's people unite together to see God's will and Word accomplished. As we'll see Wednesday night in our Bible study, they were not a prominent tribe and had to overcome adversity and low expectations to see they had a purpose and a role to play in God's family.

We need everyone here to be of one heart while we can't be physically together, to do our part in unifying us as God's local people here. It's too easy to do nothing and convince ourselves we have nothing to offer. Here we see many contributing their strength and military might to accomplish God's purpose but we also see people giving of their resources to help God's plans come true. The challenge for them at that time is the same challenge for us in our time:

Will we join together and contribute where we can through the resources and gifts we have to help each other grow in Jesus?

Will we make God's glory our priority?

Will we count the cost and stand up for truth?

Will we prayerfully discern how and when we need to obey God?

I love how this passage ends; with a party! God's people, united together to obey what God says in His Word so that all of them would experience God's blessing of shalom as they follow David, the King of Israel. When you and I unite together and do what God says in His Word, we will experience shalom as we follow the Son of David, king Jesus today.

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