

Faithfulness to God Means Unity and Purity

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[0:00] Well, Paul Brennan is preaching this morning and we're back into the studies in Joshua that he has been doing of late in fits and starts. And we're going to turn now to our Bibles and to Joshua chapter 21, reading the very end of chapter 21. If you don't have a Bible, we have Vistas Bibles at the back and at the sides, red Bibles there, some at the front.

Do pick one up and follow on. I think in those Bibles it's about page 196. And we're going to pick up the story in this last paragraph of chapter 21 and then read through the whole of Joshua chapter 22. So coming towards the end of the book and the conquest and all that has been achieved, we read this at verse 43 of chapter 21.

Thus, the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers and they took possession of it and they settled there.

And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.

[1:14] Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed. All came to pass. At that time, Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh.

And he said to them,

And when they came to the region of the Jordan, that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan. An altar of imposing size. And the people of Israel heard it and said, Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan in the region about the Jordan on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.

And when the people of Israel heard it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. Then the people of Israel sent up to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead Phinehas, the son of Eliezer, the priest.

[3:55] And with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead.

And they said to them, Thus says the whole congregation of the Lord. What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord?

Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not yet cleansed ourselves and for which there came a plague upon the whole congregation of the Lord? That you must turn away this day from following the Lord.

And if you too rebel against the Lord today, then tomorrow you will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the Lord's land where the Lord's tabernacle stands.

And take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the Lord or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the Lord our God.

[5:08] Did not Achan, the son of Zerah, bake faith in the matter of the devoted things? And wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And did he not perish alone for his iniquity?

Then the people of Reuben, of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said in answer to the heads of the families of Israel, The Mighty One, God the Lord.

The Mighty One, God the Lord. He knows. And let Israel itself know. So, if it was in rebellion or in breach of faith against the Lord, Do not spare us today for building an altar to turn away from

following the Lord.

Or if we did so to offer burnt offerings or grain offerings or peace offerings on it, May the Lord Himself take vengeance. No. But we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, What have you to do with the Lord, the God of Israel?

For the Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, You people of Reuben and the people of Gad. You have no portion in the Lord. So, your children might make our children cease to worship the Lord.

[6 : 20] And therefore, we said, Let's go and build an altar, Not for burnt offering, not for sacrifice, But to be a witness between us and you, And between our generations after us.

That we do perform the service of the Lord in His presence, With our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings. So, your children will not say to our children in time to come, You have no portion in the Lord.

And we thought, If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, We should say, Behold, the copy of the altar of the Lord, Which our fathers made, Not for burnt offerings, not for sacrifice, But to be a witness between us and you.

Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord And turn away this day from following the Lord By building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering or sacrifice, Other than the altar of the Lord our God that stands before His tabernacle.

When Phinehas, the priest and the chiefs of the congregation, The heads of the families of Israel who were with him, Heard the words that the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh spoke, It was good in their eyes.

[7 : 33] And Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the priest, Said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, Today we know that the Lord is in our midst, Because you have not committed this breach of faith against the Lord.

Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the Lord. Then Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the priest and the chiefs, Returned from the people of Reuben and of Gad and the land of Gilead To the land of Canaan, to the people of Israel, And brought back word to them.

And the report was good in the eyes of the people of Israel. Then the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them To destroy the land where the people of Reuben and the people of Gad were settled.

The people of Reuben and the people of Gad called the altar witness. For they said, It is a witness between us that the Lord is God.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. And teach us his message for us today.

[8 : 47] Well, good morning folks. Please have Joshua open in front of you. Those verses that Willie read for us earlier. Joshua 22. Joshua 22. Now the great political crises of our day can often be recalled with just one word.

Watergate. Deflategate. If you're an American football fan, that might be one for you. Deflategate from about 10 years ago. You stick gate on the end of something and it indicates some sort of crisis is brewing.

And here in Joshua 22, we have altergate. It's cracking stuff, isn't it? It's a great read. The tension builds. There's a great political crisis.

And there's maybe one you're not familiar with. Maybe this is a story you've not seen before. But it's a great story that draws us in. The drama, the tension is almost unbearable.

The Western tribes gather for war. What's going to happen? The construction of a large altar leads to almost a civil war amongst God's people, amongst the tribes of Israel.

[10 : 01] And you've been reading through Joshua, you're just wondering, where has this come from? Why are we suddenly at this point where there's almost war breaking out? The previous six or seven years, covered by the first part of the book of Joshua, chart the conquest.

Joshua leading his people over the Jordan and taking the land that's been promised to them. Six or seven years of conquest. And here we are, Joshua 22.

But it's not just great drama. It's not just a great story, is it? It's not just a lesson in war avoidance or diplomacy. No, as we'll see, this chapter is all about the faithfulness, the passionate zeal for God's people to their Lord.

We come now to the final section of the book. It's been a little while since we were last here. But we're now in the last section of the book of Joshua. Now the first part of the book up to this point,

charts the record of God's faithfulness.

Chapters 1 through 21. It begins with crossing over the Jordan. The next chunk is about the conquest. And then the middle section is about the carving up of the land.

[11 : 18] Each tribe has allocated its portion in the land. And this final section describes the responsibility of God's people.

In response to all his faithfulness, here's the response called for. In a sense, it's almost the application part of the book of Joshua.

God has again demonstrated his faithfulness over many years. And in response to that, his people are to be faithful to him. And these final three chapters of the book consist of three great gatherings of the people.

The first one's here in chapter 22. Look at verse 1. At that time, Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

That's the first gathering. Click over a page, Joshua 23, and we see the next one. 23 verse 1. A long time afterward, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well-advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel.

[12 : 28] He gathers them. Second gathering. The final gathering comes in chapter 24. Look at verse 1. Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel.

Three gatherings. Three parting words from Joshua to all the people of Israel. Three times Joshua sets out the fidelity to God that is expected by the people.

In light of all that God has done for them. In light of his unwavering faithfulness. Here is how you are to respond, people of God. Look at the end of chapter 21, which we read earlier.

Verse 45. This summarizes what's been happening through the rest of the book of Joshua. 21 verse 45. Not one word of all the good promises of the Lord that he had made to the house of Israel failed.

All came to pass. God kept every word. That's the summary of the book of Joshua up to this point. God has been faithful to you. And now, in response, you are to be faithful to God.

[13 : 39] You are to respond. And all that he's done for you, you are to respond in faithfulness. And chapter 22, it's a great chapter.

Full of suspense, full of drama. But most of all, it's a chapter that shows for all the generations of the people of God, what it means to be faithful to him.

It shows us what real loyalty to God looks like. It shows us what a concern for his glory looks like. It shows us what unity amongst God's people ought to look like.

It's a great chapter. We're going to take in three parts. The first is really setting the scene. The first nine verses of chapter 22. And we see here in this first little section that faithfulness to God is commanded.

But not before God's faithfulness to his people is rehearsed and their faithfulness commended. Here, Joshua is addressing the two and a half tribes that had their inheritance east of the river of Jordan.

[14 : 48] Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. Now, I don't have a map for you, but imagine that behind me here, the central column is the river Jordan.

It's not to scale, but imagine that's the river Jordan. On the west here is the land of Canaan. This was the land promised to Abraham all those years before. That was the land promised. But here on the east, those two and a half tribes, they took their possession early.

When they arrived, they asked Moses, could we live here on the east? And the Lord said yes. It was concession.

It wasn't his plan. But the Lord allowed it. And so those two and a half tribes were allowed to settle east of the Jordan. But those two and a half tribes did have to go over the Jordan and help the rest of them conquer the land.

And they did that. That's what's been happening up to this point. So by this stage, the conquest is done. And Joshua gathers those tribes in order to discharge them of their duties and send them back over the Jordan to their land on the east.

[15 : 59] And notice his parting words, verse 5. He says, Those are great words, aren't they?

Worth meditating on. That is what faithfulness to God looks like. Just notice all the verbs in that verse. Moses says, you are to observe, to love, to walk, to keep, to cling, to serve.

It's a beautiful picture of what it is to show fidelity to the Lord. But it's not just a bare command, is it? It doesn't come out of nowhere. No, this faithfulness to God that they're commanded to, it doesn't come out of nothing, but it comes out of a rehearsal of God's faithfulness.

It comes out of a commendation of their faithfulness up to this point. So before we get to that command in verse 5, we have God's faithfulness rehearsed.

This word of command comes off the back of 21 chapters of faithfulness of God, as we've seen. It's one that we summed up in that last paragraph of chapter 21, which we read earlier.

[17:34] Just cast your eye over that paragraph from verse 43. It's summarizing all that the Lord has done up to this point. He's given them the land that He promised.

Not one word that the Lord said has come to fall to the ground. Everything's happened, as He said. God has proved His faithfulness over and over. And it's only off the back of this great and amazing faithfulness to His people that the responsible faithfulness of God's people is required.

That's always the pattern for God's people, isn't it? For you and I, God has, in the biggest way possible, demonstrated His faithfulness to us through the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

It is only in light of what He has done already, in light of His death, resurrection, ascension, that we are called to repent and to live lives of fidelity to Him.

It's a response to all that He's done. Our faithfulness is only ever a response to His prior faithfulness.

[18:47] We're called to respond, aren't we? And that is always and will always be the pattern. Indicatives are always preceded by...

Sorry, that's wrong. Indicatives always precede imperatives. God's command always comes after His demonstration of faithfulness.

What God has done is the basis of what He commands us to then do. But not only is God's faithfulness rehearsed, faithfulness in God's people is commended.

Look again at the first few verses there, verses 2, 3, and 4. These are lovely words of genuine commendation from Joshua to the people.

Look at what He says. You have kept all that Moses commanded you, and you have obeyed my voice. You have not forsaken your brothers.

[19:51] You have been careful to keep the charge of the Lord your God. Those are such tender words, aren't they, of loving commendation.

They're a wonderful, beautiful reminder to us that real obedience to the Lord is a live option. There'll be some in the church that think, you know, obedience and faithfulness aren't really possible.

I'm a sinner. That's not what you see here, is it? Nor in the New Testament. If you're a Christian, you no longer live in the kingdom of darkness, but in the kingdom of light.

Faithfulness for the Christian is possible. And faithfulness for God's people here at the start of Joshua is commended. It's not that they were perfect.

Of course not. But they were faithful. And it's not that their faithfulness earned anything either. No, no. Their faithfulness was in response to God's prior acts of faithfulness.

[20:52] And Joshua commends them. Their general direction and priority in life were all that around God's word, his commandments, and that is to be commended.

And so, ought not you and I, and particularly those who are in roles of oversight, in leadership, if you're leading a team of any sort in the church, ought not you to encourage faithfulness when you see it in others?

It's not that we're to puff people up, but a quiet word, a brief note, a text, just to acknowledge someone's faithfulness to the Lord. That is so encouraging, isn't it?

Maybe they've persevered with a friend. They've kept inviting them to church. And they've come. That's worthy of commendation, isn't it? Perhaps somebody's plugged away for years and years teaching in junior church.

That's worthy of commendation. Maybe there's someone who has shown real care and concern for a particular person or family in the church. The unheard prayers.

[22:04] Well, unheard by us at least. But heard by the one who matters. The unheard prayers. The small acts of practical kindness that nobody else knows about.

That's worthy of commendation, isn't it? When God's people are faithful, it's not unseen by the Lord. It's not unseen by his people. It is worthy of commendation.

And Joshua commends the people here, doesn't he? He says, well done. You've been faithful. And here at the start of this chapter, faithfulness to God is commanded.

Look at verse 5. It's commanded. You are to be faithful. You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart. It is commanded, but not before God's faithfulness has been rehearsed or before their faithfulness up to this point has been commended.

Joshua says, look at what God has done for you. And he also says, look at what you've done. Well done. Keep going. And with these words ringing in their ears, Joshua sends them back east over the Jordan to the land that is theirs.

[23:20] And here's where the story turns. The tension builds. Altergate raises its head. Look at verse 10. And when these two and a half tribes came to the region of the Jordan, that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built an altar by the Jordan.

An altar of imposing size. Now, remember the map I've got here? They hadn't yet crossed the Jordan to their land. They built the altar right on the edge of the western land.

Before they crossed the Jordan, they built this altar. Now, the western tribes see this happening. They hear about it. Look at verse 11.

The people of Israel heard it. And they view it as an act of apostasy. Crisis.

The eastern tribes, can you believe it, have built an altar. Another one. You can imagine people talking about it. Altagate. This is a huge deal.

[24:33] How fragile the unity of God's people can be. The external threat of the Canaanites had dissipated. The conquest achieved. But internal divisions rapidly emerge.

Now, they don't find out. And nor do we, the readers, actually. We don't find out the real reason for the building of this altar until much later. And the real reason for the building of this altar, far from being an act of apostasy, the whole aim of it was to maintain unity amongst God's people, both now and for the future.

That was the reason they did it. But we don't know that yet. And even though a war is almost started, both sides here, both the west and the east, both sides demonstrate a ferocious desire to remain faithful to the Lord.

That's at the heart of what each side is doing here. Yes, there was initial misunderstanding. But in the end, clarity is reached and unity preserved.

The altar, instead of being a place of alternate worship, was to be a witness that pointed to the one true altar. And would be reminding all Israel that they found unity in the one place of sacrifice.

[25:57] So our second and third points this morning contain key lessons for us about what faithfulness to the Lord means and looks like in reality. It's all very well talking about it in theory.

But when the rubber hits the road, what does it look like to be faithful to the Lord? So first point, we're looking at verses 11 to 20 here. Faithfulness to God means attentive concern for true worship in the church.

It means real concern for true worship in the church. So we see here that fidelity to God results in a passion for right worship in the church.

It means knowing the devastating effects of sin on the congregation. The Western tribes, they learn about this altar being built. Look at verse 11.

And things escalate pretty quickly. DEFCON 3 is reached immediately. Troops are assembled at Shiloh in preparation for war. Can you imagine it? Just think yourself into that situation.

[27:02] You've just come to the end of conquest. Time to relax. But now, civil war is outbreak. The troops are assembled again. There's going to be a war. And they fear wholesale apostasy.

This is a big, big deal. It's worth pausing there and asking the question of ourselves. Is there any issue within the church that might get us so fired up that we'd be willing to fight for it?

Now, our weapons are no longer literal spears and swords, are they? We're not called to fight in that way. But we are in a spiritual battle.

We are called to defend the truth of the gospel. We are called to defend the honor of the Lord Jesus. We may have to take costly stands for the Lord. Can we imagine any issue moving us to the extent that the Western tribes are moved to here?

Do we care enough about the honor of the Lord that we'd be bothered to do something about his dishonoring? If we were there at the time, would this altar being built, would it register at all?

[28:23] Or would we be so apathetic we think, oh, I can't be bothered. It's not a big deal. It's quite challenging to think about that, isn't it? Is there anything that would move us to the point of picking up our spiritual weapons?

Now, clearly the people here get ready to take action. They don't rush in, though, full of self-righteousness. What do they do? Well, they send a delegation of their best men, headed by Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the priest, and they come to the Eastern tribes, and we learn what is the root of their concerns.

Look at verse 16. They've sent their delegation. Verse 15, they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, the people of Manasseh, and this delegation from the West say to them, thus says the whole congregation of the Lord, what is this breach of faith that you've committed against the Lord, the God of Israel, by turning away this day from following the Lord, by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord?

That's their concern. That's why they're so worked up. They fear a breach.

They fear disobedience. They fear rebellion. Serious accusations. And those accusations, if they were true, it was entirely legitimate for them to get so worked up about it.

[30:00] Because Moses had not many years before warned and expressly condemned this sort of thing. You can read about it in Jude 1, 3. They were not permitted to build alternate worship places.

They couldn't establish other altars. There was only one. And so with Moses' words fresh in their minds, they took this altar building as a sign of apostasy. They perhaps had their suspicions about these tribes anyway.

They were unwilling to settle on the land west of the Jordan. They settled on the east. Suspicions were perhaps circulating. What else could this altar represent?

Why else would they do that? They couldn't think about it. They couldn't work it out. An altar built to compete with the one true altar at the tabernacle. That was their perception. That was their understanding.

They didn't shrug their shoulders and let it go. No, their attentive concern for true worship amongst God's people moved them to take action. They challenged it.

[31:05] And they challenged it because they knew that the effects of such apostasy wouldn't just be limited to those eastern tribes. It would be devastating for the whole people of Israel.

Look at the two examples they mention. Look at verse 17 and down to 20. Yeah, down to 20. They cite two previous examples in their recent history where sin has had massive corporate implications.

The sin at Peor and the sin at Achan in verse 20. Both those events had massive corporate implications.

You see, sin never stops of the ones who are actually responsible. It spreads. It's infectious. The western tribes knew that.

And so they take this very seriously indeed. They knew this wasn't just an isolated thing east of the Jordan. It concerned all of them. And that is a great challenge for God's people down through every age, isn't it?

[32:16] To maintain a watchful, attentive concern for true worship in the church. It's a good sign that the western tribes are so troubled. To have and to show a great concern for true worship in the church, that is a sign of health.

If they just turned a blind eye, shrugged their shoulders, that would have been concerning. But the fact they care deeply, that is a good thing.

To not let willful disobedience go unchallenged. To not turn a blind eye. To call it for what it is. And that's often a costly thing to do.

We know that as a congregation. It cost us a building. How about, what was that, 15 years ago? It remains costly today to challenge apostasy in the church.

To pull up a friend who you know is drifting away. To have that difficult conversation. The one you'd really not rather have. That's costly, isn't it?

[33:28] To see your leaders. To see the undershepherds that God has set over the flock. To see them tackling blatant, unrepentant sin in the life of one or more people in the church.

That is a good thing. It may perhaps shock us to actually see church discipline being carried out. But, we live in a church culture that increasingly labels anything like that as spiritual abuse.

I've seen it. Well, if the Western tribes had done nothing. If their perception of events had in fact proved true.

It would have spelled disaster. And so too for the church today. Serious sin in the life of the church. If unchallenged. If unchallenged. If ignored.

If just sort of skated over. Brushed under the carpet. That is fatal. Now don't mishear me. This is not about everyday minor sin. No.

[34 : 35] The Western tribes feared whole scale apostasy. This is a major, major issue. A flat rebellion. A rejection of the one true God. A deliberate walking away. A turning to other gods.

That's what they feared was happening. And they were willing to take action. And so for us. The challenge is do we share that concern? Do we have that passion?

For the pure worship of the Lord in this church? What does that look like? Well, when church leaders.

Tackle big issues. In order to safeguard the gospel. And the pure worship of the church. Back them. Stand with them. Trust them.

Our world. Would encourage us. To be suspicious of those in authority. It's not to deny that abuses have taken place. But. The presumption.

[35 : 35] In the church. Ought to be trust. Of those leaders God has put in place. Not distrust. Trust. And friends. That attitude is rife. In the UK evangelical church.

Just read Peter Adams article in the evangelicals now. Last week. It is a massive problem. God has placed leaders in his church for a reason.

And the presumption. The presumption. Is to be trust. Not distrust. And when they tackle big issues like this. We're to trust them. Well this is what faithfulness to God looked like.

In that moment. For the western tribes. They. They saw this happening. They feared the worst. They did something about it. And that brings us to.

The end of verse 20. And. The whole thing hangs in the balance at this point. The western tribes have made their accusation. What are the response.

[36 : 37] From the eastern tribes. What are they going to say. What's behind this altar. How can they explain it. Well it wasn't just the western tribes. That had real passionate.

Zeal for the faithfulness of the Lord. The eastern tribes also. Sought to be faithful to the Lord. That's our third and final point. Faithfulness to God means.

Concern for true unity. In the church. Both now. And for the future. True. Unity. We see here that fidelity to God.

Results. In great concern. For unity amongst the church. Today. And for the generations to come. The eastern tribes respond. And they are absolutely emphatic.

We are not apostate. Actually it's the complete opposite. Our intention. Is to aid faithfulness. It's not an indication of our abandonment of it.

[37 : 34] Look at what they say there in verse 26. Therefore. We said. Let us now build an altar. Not. For burnt offering.

Not. For sacrifice. But. To be a witness. Between us. And you. And between our generations. After us. That we do perform. The service of the Lord.

And his presence. With our burnt offerings. And our sacrifices. And peace offerings. So your children. Will not say to our children. In time to come. You've no portion in the Lord. Their concern. Was. That the river Jordan here. In the middle. Was going to prove. In the long run. To be more than a physical barrier. That it would eventually prove. To be a spiritual barrier.

And so they built. This large altar. Of imposing size. You couldn't miss it. They built it. On the opposite side of the Jordan. From where they lived. If they really were apostates.

[38 : 33] If they really were. Wanting to make sacrifices. To other gods. Would they not have built it. In their own land. Each of the Jordan. This was not an altar. To be used. As an altar. It was a copy.

Of the real thing. It was there. To remind them. Of the true altar. To remind them. Of the one place. Where sacrifices could be made. At the tabernacle. Verse 29. It was.

In the closing words. Of our passage. To be an altar. That was a witness. Between the western tribes. And the eastern tribes. That there was one God. That the Lord.

Is God. That's why they built the altar. That was its purpose. Those eastern tribes. Over here. They had a clear eye.

On the future. Didn't they? They knew. They knew. That they had to take steps. In the present. To enable. The faithfulness. Of the future generations. Their intention.
[39 : 30] Was to build an altar. That pointed future generations. To the one. And same God. To the one. Only place. For the sacrifice. Of sins. That was their intention.

Now perhaps. Now perhaps. More wisdom. Could have been exercised. In the execution. Of that intention. Building an altar. Without explanation.
Could and was. Interpreted. Interpreted. As apostasy. They could have anticipated that. Perhaps. Should they not have anticipated. The reaction. From the western tribes.
Probably. Did they not consider. That putting up this altar. Was playing with fire. They knew why they were doing it. But would future generations.
Be as clear on that. These. Two and a half tribes. Over here. On the east. In reality. They hadn't made.

[40 : 24] Good choices. Up to this point. Yes. The Lord. And Moses. Had allowed them. To settle on the east. Of the Jordan. Instead of taking their inheritance. West. But it was a concession.

It was. As history would bear out. An unwise move. Listen to this. From 1 Chronicles 5. The members.

Of the half tribe. Of Manasseh. Lived. In the land. They were very numerous. But. They broke faith. With the God. Of their fathers. And whored.
After the gods. Of the peoples. Of the land. Whom God. Had destroyed. Before them. So the God of Israel. Stirred up the spirit. Of the king of Assyria. And he took them. Into exile.
Namely. The Reubenites. The Gadites. And the half tribe. Of Manasseh. Here on the east. They were vulnerable. And so it proved.

[41 : 21] The whole enterprise. Of setting up shop. On the east of the Jordan. Was deeply unsatisfactory. They would have been better. To go west. With the other. Nine and a half tribes. They would have been better off.

Going with everybody else. To trust God's best for them. But these two and a half tribes. They wanted to set themselves apart. Perhaps. Another nine and a half. They thought they had a better. Estimation. What was best for themselves. They thought they knew better. Than the Lord. Perhaps. It's a little warning to us. I think. Of putting confidence. In our own judgment. Rather than trusting. What God has clearly expressed. In his word. For our good. So do hear the warning. Of the eaten tribes. But don't miss. The encouragement either. Their intentions.

Were good. Their intention. Was to build an altar. That pointed future generations. To the one. The same God. To the one. And true place. To sacrifice for sin. And our task.

[42 : 21] In many ways. Is the same. Isn't it today? We are to point. God's people. Now. And in the future. To the one. Place. For sacrifice of sin. To the cross.

Of Calvary. The Lord Jesus. Died. In our place. For our sin. We are to point people. To that reality. All the time. And so. Is the faithfulness.

Of our children. The next generation. And the one after that. Is that a source. Of concern for us? Are we doing things now. To secure. Their faithfulness.

In times to come. Not a. Not a fearful anxiety. But rather. Are we sufficiently concerned. For the generation to come. That we are doing something now. To teach them.

To equip them. so fathers and mothers, parents are you teaching and pointing your children to Christ you don't need special theological training for that task to do it well simple demonstration of right priorities is so important building family life around the church rather than the other way around simple reading of the Bible at bedtime as part of that routine there's so many resources out there take your pick you don't need to be a superstar Christian to be able to do that I speak as someone who is not a superstar Christian it's possible perhaps you're not a parent yourself but all of us here have responsibilities don't we as the church as we think about the future generations think on the baptismal services we have the obligations that we as a congregation promise to take for nurturing and teaching our children here are the words that we read out in the course of that service these are words put to the congregation as a whole it says this we who are gathered here as the household of faith also bear responsibilities under God for this little one we too are called to play our part in the nurture and the way of Christ by our prayers and our mutual commitment to their parents to encourage them to be steadfast for him that's for all of us you and I all of us bear responsibility for the unity of the church and of the equipping of future generations that they too may

worship the Lord in unity it's not just for our children though is it those who are new in the faith those who have come from death to life and found their salvation amongst us we're to care and nurture for them as well all of us can play a part in that in looking after new Christians helping them grow that's how the church is going to be built isn't it the nurture of our young ones and the reaching out for the lost in our city that's our task that was the concern of the eastern tribes here they were thinking about the future think about their children think about the unity of the church for the long term it's a unity based built founded on only

[45 : 36] God's revealed word a unity of right worship of the true God and a strong opposition to apostasy a unity of faithfulness to the Lord and to living out what he has commanded they cared about the unity of the whole people didn't they they wanted to make sure that both the east and the west were worshipping the one true God they were united in that unity is important but it can't be sacrificed on the altar of purity it is not a case of unity at any cost it is not a case of turning a blind eye to major issues just so a veneer of unity can be maintained that isn't unity that's playing that's pretend no no what is clear here is that purity is the basis for unity unity must be based on fidelity fidelity to the Lord and his ways loyalty to the Lord and his ways is the basis for unity in every age of the church you can't have unity without that the Lord of Joshua or the people of Israel he's my Lord and yours he has demonstrated to us extraordinary faith in us hasn't he not just in our day to day lives not just in the normal provision of our foods our water shelter our family but in ultimate things he has provided for us his grace he's brought us into his family forever he's joined us to Christ we are his nothing can shake that and so this chapter would urge us in light of that reality in light of his faithfulness to us we are called to be faithful to him and that looks like real concern for true worship in the church it looks like real concern for the unity of the church both now and in the future that is what we are called to and by God's help we'll do it let's pray our father God we do thank you for the wonderful privilege that we have in being your people done in no merit of our own no achievements that we have managed to achieve none of these things have earned our way in but you by your grace have welcomed us you've called us to be part of your family forever and so would you help us to respond to your great faithfulness in grateful obedience that we would demonstrate real concern for the right worship of you our God and of a real unity in the church which is based on real fidelity to you help us Lord as individuals as a church to remain faithful to you come what may through all the ups and downs of life through all the tumults and troubles that we may face would you help us Lord help us please to remain faithful to you to the very end of our days we ask this in Jesus name Amen