

Hymns: 7 God Will Take Care of You 8 Great Is Thy Faithfulness
 9 His Eye Is on the Sparrow

Scripture: Psalm 34:3-10; 15-19
 Big idea: Camelot Moment

Our scripture text for today is: **Joshua 21:1-45**

Who remembers the story of Camelot? The key players were King Arthur, Queen Guenevere, and Sir Lancelot. The knights of the round table united around the **noble** slogan “might for right.” The idyllic short-lived rapture of the moment came crashing down when ruined by a villain son of King Arthur named Mordred who fostered a love triangle among the main characters and brought to ruin all that was once Camelot.

Can you think of a time during your lifetime that compared to Camelot? That’s right, young President Kennedy, his lovely wife, and little children lived in presidential luxury as the most admired family on earth – until suddenly tragedy struck. On Friday, November 22, 1963 at 12:30 p.m. in Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was assassinated – ending their Camelot experience in a **moment**. In a December 6, 1963 article from Life Magazine we read the recently widowed Jackie Kennedy recalling:

At night, before we’d go to sleep, Jack liked to play some records: and the song he loved most came at the very end of this record. The lines he loved were:

*Don’t let it be forgot,
 that once there was a spot,
 for one brief shining **moment**
 that was known as Camelot. ...*

There’ll be great Presidents again [...] but there’ll never be another Camelot again.

In Joshua chapter 22, we see something similar going on. The LORD had fulfilled all of His promises, the Israelites were in the Promised Land, and they **rested** from war. As we ended last time:

Joshua 21

*[43] And the LORD gave unto Israel **all the land** which he sw[o]re to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein.*

*[44] And the LORD gave them **rest round about**, according to all that he sw[o]re unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of **all their enemies** before them; the LORD delivered **all their enemies** into their hand.*

*[45] There failed not ought of **any good thing** which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; **all** came to pass.*

God proved assuredly that He is faithful to His word.

So let’s move on to chapter 22 and see what happened to the Israelites in their Camelot **moment**.

Joshua 22:1-9

In verse 1 Joshua summons the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Why did he single them out? Recall these two and a half tribes had taken possession of land on the **east** side of the Jordan River while Moses led the Israelites. In Joshua chapter 1, Joshua conscripted them to military service to help their brethren conquer the Promised Land. Then, here in Joshua 22:4, he gave them final (honorable) discharge from this military duty as he promised back in chapter 1 and sent them home with his blessing (Joshua 22:6). He listed the following as their accomplishments:

1. Kept all of Moses' commands.
2. Obeyed all of Joshua's orders.
3. Stayed and fought with the rest of the troops.
4. Kept the commandments of the LORD.

(Joshua 22:2-3)

In his final address to them, Joshua gave these two-and-a-half tribes the following counsel:

1. Keep the commandments Moses gave them.
2. Love the LORD your God.
3. Walk in all His ways.
4. Keep the commandments of the LORD.
5. Cleave unto Him.
6. Serve Him with all your heart.
7. Serve Him with all your soul.

(Joshua 22:5)

Joshua also reminded them that they had received **great riches** from the spoils (plunder) of war:

1. Very much cattle
2. Silver
3. Gold
4. Brass
5. Iron
6. Much clothing

(Joshua 22:8)

What did Joshua tell them to do with their gains of victory?

He said to share them with their brethren (Joshua 22:8).

And with that, they left Shiloh and headed home (Joshua 22:9). So far, things were going great for the Israelites, but as with Camelot, things were about to change.

Joshua 22:10-34

On their way home, guess what did the two-and-a-half tribes decided to do? Construct a great altar to “see to” or look upon (Joshua 22:10).

Joshua 22

[10] And when they **came unto** the borders of Jordan,
that are **in the land of Canaan**,
the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh
built there an altar by Jordan, a **great altar** to see to.

Where specifically was this built? Apparently, this site has never been located by archaeologists. It should be relatively easy to find as the path from Shiloh, across the Jordan River, to their destination in Gilead is dictated by topography. They built the altar:

1. On the shore of the Jordan River.
2. In the land of Canaan. That means it was on the **west** shore of the Jordan likely near Gilgal.

When the Israelites in the Promised Land heard an **altar** was built, they gathered at Shiloh (their home base) and prepared to go to war (**civil war**) against their brethren (vv. 11-12).

[11] And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel.

*[12] And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up **to war** against them.*

Do you see the picture here? The Israelites had:

1. Endured 400 years of **slavery** in Egypt.
2. Were **chased** and **trapped** by the mighty Egyptian army.
3. **Miraculously** crossed the Red Sea over dry land where the pursuing Egyptian army then drowned.
4. **Wandered** in the wilderness eating manna for forty years.
5. Joshua **miraculously** led them across the overflowing Jordan River on dry land.

6. For fifty years they **defeated** the Canaanites and **took possession** of their land in the Promised Land.
7. Leaving them at home and at **peace** at last – until they decided to **war** against their brethren.

Isn't that the way it is in our country and even our personal lives? When we're consumed with fighting to stay alive, to defeat an enemy from outside, or even trying to care for a young family, we have neither the time nor energy to bicker among ourselves. But when we finally are at rest, that's when **tragically**, so often we turn on each other.

And that's exactly what happened here. There were no foes on the outside. The time was ripe to turn on each other. Even so, civil war over an altar seems a bit **rash** doesn't it? Exactly what prompted such a **radical** reaction?

Years earlier, Moses specifically **warned** against **factions** setting up altars in various places for sacrifice after they have been given the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 12:10-11, 13-14).

Deuteronomy 12

[10] But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God give[s] you to inherit, and when he give[s] you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety;

That's the point they had **finally** reached after all of the long ordeal to get there.

[11] Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; th[ere] shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:

[13] Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest:

[14] But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes,

there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings,

and **there** thou shalt do all that I command thee.

Having such a thing as another altar in their nation would evoke God's wrath on them and forfeit His blessing (Deuteronomy 13:17; Joshua 22:18).

Unlike the heathen, the Israelites were to have **only one place in the entire nation** that the LORD specified to meet him and perform sacrifices (Deuteronomy 12:11, 13-14). Part of the reason for this was to assure the Israelites remain **one people** united by **one God**. The place he had chosen at that time was Shiloh in the Promised Land. That was where they set up the **tabernacle** and where they offered their **sacrifices**.

The tribes from the west, sent Phinehas, the son of the Eleazar the high priest, to Gilead to investigate exactly what was going on with that altar (Joshua 22:13). Notice Gilead was about 10 miles east of the Jordan River and about 20 miles north of the Dead Sea across the river from Shiloh.¹ In addition, a leader from each of the ten tribes of the west (Joshua 22:14) went with him. Despite this high-powered delegation, the west did not send either Joshua or Eleazar (the high priest) who were still in charge and able to inquire of the LORD (Deuteronomy 13:14). They could have avoided this whole painful incident, if they had only consulted the LORD first. You may recall Joshua made that same mistake in dealing with the Gibeonites and “asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD (Joshua 9:14).”

The leader of the delegation from the Promised Land confronted the tribes of the east with a question based on the LORD’s instructions.

Joshua 22

*[18] ... must ye turn away this day from following the LORD? and it will be,
seeing ye rebel to day against the LORD,
that to morrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel.*

The leaders from the Promised Land proceeded to confront the two-and-a half tribes of the east with the following charges:

1. Trespassing (sinning) against God.
2. Turning away from following the LORD.
3. Building an altar to rebel against the LORD.

(Joshua 22:16)

Phinehas, the spokesman for the west reminded them of Peor. Peor refers to worship of the false god of Moab, Baal-peor. We will look at this next time in detail. In short, God killed 24,000 of the Israelites with a plague until Moses purged those who had fallen into idolatry by killing them (Numbers 25:3-5; 9).

Phinehas proceeded to offer the tribes of the east space in the west, to live there in the Promised Land (Joshua 22:19). He also reminded them of Achan – where not only Achan died for his sins but his family, his livestock (Joshua 7:24-25), and about thirty-six Israelite soldiers died as well (Joshua 7:5). Also, that the LORD’s wrath came upon **all** of the Israelites (Joshua 22:20) as a result of the sin of

1 “King James Bible Dictionary,” accessed August 17, 2021, <http://www.kingjamesbibledictionary.com/Dictionary/gilead>.

Achan until they had dealt with it.

After Phineas made his case, the tribes of the east responded:

1. They appealed to the LORD.
2. They said the altar was not for any of the following:
 1. Turning from following the LORD.
 2. Sacrifice.
 3. Burnt offerings.
3. They were concerned that because the river separates the tribes, the tribes of the west may shut out those from the east from worshiping the LORD.
4. They built the altar as a **witness** to prevent future generations in the west from saying **to** those in the east *Ye have no part in the LORD*. The altar [a memorial of sorts] testifies that they **do** have a part.
5. They acknowledged that there is only one altar, and that is the one in the tabernacle of the LORD.

(Joshua 22:22-29)

How did the delegation from the Promised Land react to the east's reply?

Joahua 22

[30] And when Phinehas the priest,

*and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh sp[o]ke, it **pleased them**.*

[31] And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh,

*This day we perceive that the LORD **is** among us, because ye have **not** committed this trespass against the LORD: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD.*

In other words, your act of building this memorial will **not** invite the wrath of the LORD upon us.

[32] And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the princes, returned from ... out of the land of Gilead, unto the land of Canaan [the Promised Land], to the children of Israel, and brought them word again.

*[33] And the thing **pleased** the children of Israel;
and the children of Israel blessed God,*

and did not intend to go up against them in battle, to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt.

*[34] And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the **altar Ed** [meaning witness]:
[why?]*

for it shall be a witness between us that the LORD is God.

So at least for now, the Israelites were saved from a **disastrous** and **bloody** civil war.

Application

I suppose everyone here has had at least one Camelot **moment** in his or her life. I remember one vividly from forty years ago at not a round table but a rectangular one and even wondered as it happened if things would come crashing down from there. They did. It's inevitable that we can experience fairy-tale times – but only for a **moment**. From mountain peaks, there is nowhere to go but down. We live in a **fallen** world. What can we do?

II Corinthians 4

*[17] For our light affliction, which is but for **a moment**, work[s] for us a far more **exceeding** and **eternal** weight of glory;*

Whatever our trial, whatever our difficulty, it too is only temporary, and in light of eternity not significant.

*[18] While we **look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.***

Jesus also advised us to change our focus:

Matthew 6

*[34] **Take therefore no thought for the morrow:**
for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.
Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

John 16

*[33]... In the world **ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Apostle Paul:

I Corinthians 7

[28] But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh:

While marriage can bring great joy, it brings with it more physical problems and can bring an earthly focus with the associated conflicts and sorrows. We experience our lives **moment-by-moment**. While some **moments** can take us to the heights, others drag us to the depths of despair. Especially in those

difficult times, we can take great comfort in the truth that whatever problem we endure, in light of our eternal future, it is indeed **only for a moment**.

Benediction

*The LORD bless thee, and **keep** thee:*

*The LORD make his face **shine** upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*

The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

© Ron Harrod, 2023.

This document may be reproduced for noncommercial use only.