

Five Major Problems Of The Pilgrimage

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This sermon does not begin on exactly the same subject it became as I prepared. However, I will, I believe, end on part of the same basic subject that I originally began preparing about the same time that Richard issued the speaking schedule for the festival season. Now, if that sounds a bit confusing, so be it. But it is certainly not my intention to confuse.

The overall subject is in regard to judging. I was really happy to listen to what Ted [Bowling] was saying in his sermonette because it fills a part of this sermon as well. But the overall subject is on judging—God's, ours—and some purposes that go with that subject. Mostly, its topic is in regard to God's judgments made during the course of Israel's pilgrimage after being freed from their bondage in Egypt. But those judgments will come a little bit later.

I chose this subject because our observation of the Feast of Trumpets is in our near future, and Trumpets can certainly be called truly a major judgment day. God made a great number of judgments during those forty years of journeying of the Israelites in the wilderness. Literally, thousands of Israelites died as a result of their stubborn forgetfulness, their faithlessness to God's commands, their careless self-centeredness, and their lack of gratitude. Their conduct is in full display in the Bible's pages. How quickly they overlooked that they were freed from slavery! And despite being out in the wilderness and on their way to the Promised Land, their physical needs like food and water and other things were obviously miraculously supplied nonstop every day—forty years worth. That is incredible! And yet their almost nonstop complaining also rarely stopped.

Now, I do not want to treat the hardships that God put them through on occasions to have not been worth all the efforts because forty years in those circumstances was not like a Sunday afternoon walk in a local park. Despite having lived through the hardships of their bondage, it still was not easy for

those hardy people to live huge sections of their lives never dreaming that their "liberty" from bondage would never be spent experiencing living like they were having to do.

Brethren, salvation does not come cheap. Jesus' investment alone is priceless. But we have to invest our lives in it as His subjects in order to experience what the speech (sic) was about.

I think it is fair to say as time moves on toward the return of Jesus Christ, that life in the church of God is gradually growing to become more difficult and certainties are not happening as frequently, it seems, as they did before this time. What we had in America before will take a long, long time coming back again, if it ever does. Life in the good old USA has lost much of its free wheeling luster and the times keep looking more and more bleak, tarnished, and threatening in the good old USA. It ought to be said by us each and every day, "Come, Lord Jesus." However, there is a great deal of life yet to be lived and thus there are opportunities for growth in glorifying God.

The overall subject involves judging, and we are moving towards a period of time of great uncertainty in terms of being a free and easy time. And I believe that because this nation is continuing to abandon its God-given leadership among the nations of this world by continuing its retreat from what we knew or called the American way. We have continued abandoning it almost from its beginning and thus the continued progress into the immorality gutter will continue on slowly.

Now I am going to provide a platform on the subject of judging from within the Sermon on the Mount. We will not be spending a lot of time there because Jesus touched on so many individual topics in one message as He laid the foundation in that message regarding church member behavior several years before He literally formed the church, and not long before His death in our behalf.

Learning to judge accurately and in correct attitudes is not just important, it is *very* important! Brethren, kings and priests, which we all hope to be, judge. That is their job and we are getting kick started before we ever get there and we are learning it from the two greatest judges who ever lived. But we have to learn a great deal about judging even before we are actually in a

position to carry out those responsibilities. There is much judging to be done right now in this life and within this congregation.

Turn with me in the book of Matthew, chapter 7. I want to remove any doubt whatever that might be in your mind about us being allowed to give judgments. They are absolutely part of the learning we have to do.

Matthew 7:1-2 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged [do not lose that, that is a very important point]; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Be careful of how you judge things, especially if it is other people. Now, this is our Savior telling us this, "with the measure that we judge, it will be measured back." That is nothing to sniff at. He says,

Matthew 7:3-6 "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? [It is already there.] Hypocrites! [Jesus said] First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and tear you to pieces."

While we are on this subject here, let us go to the book of Luke

Luke 6:37-38 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. [Hey, that is pretty good. All three of those categories.] Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

How? Let us read a little bit further.

Luke 6:39-42 He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye."

Now these statements, though made at different times by Jesus, are actually quite similar, that is, in terms of their overall message and what we can conclude from them in terms of judging,

Let us go back to the book of Matthew, again in chapter 7, verses 1-5. I ask, why does Jesus speak so sternly about this subject? Because there very well may be a stern reason *why* He spoke so strongly. It is because, if done inaccurately or made in the wrong attitude, especially within God's own Family, it may come back and wound you as well as the person on the receiving end. Let us look at verse 2 once again.

Matthew 7:2 "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged."

What was your judgment like that you gave to another person? Boom! It is going to boomerang. Jesus does not lie; it is going to come back at you. In some way, shape, or form there will be a difficulty piled on us because of the attitude of the judgment that we made that was unfair to this person.

He spoke sternly because if done accurately or made in the wrong attitude, especially within God's Family, it will come back and wound you. Notice I changed the word there, it will come back and *wound* you as well as the person on the receiving end. Now this restriction given in verse 2 does not mean that a disciple never judges. For example, a judgment is required in order to obey what it says in verse 6, just a few verses later.

Matthew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

That is pretty strong. It is awfully good to watch our attitude in our judgments that we give to other people.

Jesus does not give conflicting orders. So in verse 2 He says, "Judge not," but in verse 6, He comes right around. He says, "Do not give what is holy to the to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces." Brethren, we have to make the judgment of whether that person is a dog or whether they are a swine, whether they are either or both in reality. We will chase this out a little bit further.

Now, an overview of this subject at this point of what Jesus is saying is He does not want His people going around seething in carping criticism and fault finding. Not a very good attitude to be in. So God wants us to make a good picture of a Christian, one of His children, before them.

The terms dogs and swine are given here; Jesus said them. They are for enemies of God. That is what they called them apparently. So what is the advice so far? Let them alone.

Let us go to a place where this is looked at a little bit further. We are going to go to II Corinthians, chapter 6.

II Corinthians 6:11-18 [the apostle Paul is speaking here] O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their

God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

I said just a little bit earlier that Jesus does not give conflicting orders. So an overview of what Jesus is saying there in those Matthew and Luke references, He does not want His people to go around seething in carping criticism and fault finding. Dogs and swine are terms for enemies; let them alone.

Here in II Corinthians 6, verses 11 through 18 are an excellent example of this in an historical situation thing. Herod Antipas loved to hear John the Baptist preach. He made a friendship with John the Baptist because he liked him. He is a preacher, but he liked him. John the Baptist, though, did not hold back the condemnation of Herod because there was a marriage that was made that was not good at all.

Turn to the book of Mark please because something is going to happen to these two people when John the Baptist corrected Herod.

Mark 6:14 Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead [How did he know he was dead?], and therefore these powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded."

This was his friend, John the Baptist, that he loved to hear preach and had conversations with him, undoubtedly about godly things, spiritual things.

Mark 6:16-26 But when Herod heard this, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded. He has been raised from the dead." For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John

[he was still alive then], knowing that he was a just and a holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. [He loved to hear John speak.]

Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom." So she went out [of the room] and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her [and he did not, his vanity got to him].

What is Jesus saying? That when we are not careful when we make judgments against even people of the world, but most especially those within the church, it is going to come back on us. That is a promise; you have to be very careful. Now, He is not saying do not judge at all. He *is* saying be very careful how you do what you do, how it is said, and whether it is literally true. God is very good at punishing His children for their good and that is something that He cannot just let stand right within His own Family.

Now here is some advice. Jesus is showing us that every challenge does not have to be answered to unbelieving people. Follow Jesus' example. When Jesus was put on trial, He kept his mouth shut! Is that not true? And was very, very careful of what He said, how He responded to Pilate. When He went through it, that trial was *very* unfair. I mean, the ultimate in being unfair. He never opened His mouth to defend Himself. He just said almost nothing. We have to be very careful.

Let me make sure that you get this. Jesus is not saying, do not judge at all. What He is saying is be very careful what is said and how you do it

I am purposely going through this because I have been advocating, let us be awfully on the ball these next five years or so because I think that they are going to be very trying. I am not saying that there is going to be persecution on the church directly, but I am saying it is going to be pretty trying to keep up with what is going on and avoid things that we do not have to get involved in.

Now I want you to turn with me, because Jesus' own brother said something in regard to this. He was not an apostle, but he was Jesus' brother and he must have learned a thing or two. We are going to go to the book of James and we are going to look at something in chapter 3. Chapter 3, incidentally, my Bible has this section titled "The Untamable Tongue."

James 3:1-8 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so, the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison [we are carrying in around in our mouth].

That is why Jesus spoke so sternly. Now, He did not say, do not judge at all. He is just saying there in the Sermon on the Mount, be careful, because some things need to be corrected.

James 3:9-12 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessings and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and

bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

What James wrote there is exceedingly clear and I feel really needs no further expounding at this time. If we choose to do this, we better make sure we have all our truths in order. Do we see a lesson here? Every judgment that we make may able to be boomeranged back on us. So, he is just saying, be very careful because every judgment we make becomes the basis for our own judgment.

That was the end of the first part of the message. I wanted to make sure that we understand, as we move toward these next five years or so, it might get pretty interesting out there the way things have already changed, especially over the last 100 years. It is incredible how the United States of America has changed and it is moving faster than ever before. So I think that in that five year period Christ is not going to return at that time, but it might be a very difficult period of time simply to live through it.

Let us go to Romans the 14th chapter because we are still on the same subject, but not that aspect of it.

Romans 14:10-12 [Paul asks this] Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself before God.

This portion of this message covers an overview of some of God's judgments of Israel during the 40 years in the wilderness. It is not a detailed covering of them, but is intended as a reminder of the few principles important to us at this time. And I think it is very interesting that He preserved the incidents that He did for all time in the Bible. Remember they were out there for 40 years. How many judgments did He make that were not recorded by Moses and put into the the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy? There were an awful lot of them. But He chose five particular sins out of the 40-year wilderness journey.

I know when I was putting this particular sermon together, I got to thinking, "Why these five? Why not the other five?" Maybe He saved them (of course They saved, preserved, the Bible right on through all this time) because these are sins that the Israelitish people might be subject to, because we follow into them quite easily. Let us put it that way.

So again, I want to keep repeating, He is God. Jesus is not saying we cannot judge. He is just saying be very careful.

We are advancing or moving over to another aspect of judging. Perhaps this sermon can be somewhat of a prepper leading into the next five years or so. The pressures, those changes, apply to our conversion, even though we very probably do not practice a single one of them, maybe never really practiced a single one of them. Their implementation will create social responses that God has already judged as part of the difficulties we must bear up under.

Let me repeat. These are five specific sins He saved from the wilderness journey, and what His judgments were regarding what those people did, complained about. Now, how do I know that this is true that we may have to go through through something very similar? Because when changes in a good way occur and impact the public in a good way, as with the forming of the Christian church in Jerusalem just after Christ died and they celebrated Pentecost and on they went. Then they returned to their homes and what happened? Persecution broke out.

What happens in the public does not miss us by very much, we are part of it. So when the Christian church was formed by Jesus not too long before His own death, and then when Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit was given, persecution broke out. God did not remove the converted people from the area of Jerusalem, they had to endure it.

Now here we are in a portion of the Israelitish people here in the United States of America and there are converted people all through the United States of America. And I would guess, since our God is still on His throne and persecution breaks out, some of it is going to be aimed at us over this time. The times that we are living in within these nations, the United States and Britain, combines two elements important to our lives under God.

One we touched on in an earlier message (that was a sermon or two ago). It is that whether we realize it or not, we are a people on the move. We are on the move with our lives within God's creative program, as the Israelites were on the move in the wilderness trip. And as we learned towards the beginning of that previous sermon, we are on a journey to a holy place. We are going somewhere toward a very definite location, destination, and pointed to that destination by God Himself. In fact, that might be the very reason He called us at this time. In one sense, we had no choice in the matter because God chose us before we chose Him. And like the Israelites, we do not even know the specific route that we are to follow.

As a simple overview of what God chose us to do is, first of all, overall, is to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to prepare for the Kingdom of God regardless of where we are or the circumstance we are in. The second element has to do with gaining experiences within the subject of judging. One of the major things that God is teaching us. Kings and priests judge. I mean, it is that simple. That is what we are headed for in a position in the Kingdom of God. And so we are traveling to a holy place and that holy place *is* the Kingdom of God. Even though we are not mobile, we are nonetheless traveling.

So the time before us is for learning to judge, and in order to learn the judge, we have got to know the laws. Right? All right!

Now, God Himself oversees all judging in His Family. However, judging is not only something we are permitted to do, but in all its phases it is something we *must* do. *We are required to make judgments.* We are required to make judgments *regarding our own behavior*, if nothing else. Judging is making an evaluation by careful weighing of evidence. It is for us an on-the-job requirement and this is because in God's purpose we must make judgments because they give excellent insight into God's evaluation of us on the level of progress of our conversion. How are we doing learning to judge?

Now since action, that is, conduct, deportment, or behavior follows a judgment, He can clearly determine whether we yet fit what He is preparing us for following the resurrection. Our judgments provide God with evidence for His evaluation for us, and that is why they are so important! I cannot

make it any plainer. How are we going to make good judgments in our own life if we do not even know the law? We can get by, but it would be far better to know more and more and more—because they become the basis of God's evaluation of us. It is not the only basis, but it is a major one. Very important.

There will be no Adams and Eves to mess things up in the Kingdom of God. Now, if we make it, we will not be an Adam and Eve because we will be thoroughly refined as to character before that occasion arrives. God is not only saving people, He is creating other children in the character image of Jesus Christ at the same time. In addition to that element regarding God's judgments is that we too must frequently evaluate whether our judgments of ourselves regarding God's way are on target with His righteousness. And I think we can all agree that learning to judge accurately is very, very important to our spiritual development.

Let us turn to I Peter 4, verse 14. This has to do with bearing up under having to live in these next five years or so.

I Peter 4:14-17 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part, He is blasphemed, but on your part, He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come [hang on to this next few words, I know you know them] for judgment to begin at the house of God. . .

This is one of the reasons why Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are so important. Because there is the foundation and the basis of the written judgments and laws of God. Everything expands from those five books. I can tell you, I am going through it myself. I am writing every word: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. I want to know it! Especially since I began realizing how important judgment is, and I am making judgments every day and so are you. They do not always carry, let us say, the weight with them of a law of God. But nonetheless, they impact on my life and on my judgment before God and I better be getting things right.

I Peter 4:17-19 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved [hey, that is coming from Jesus' apostle, Peter], where will the ungodly and the sinner [one who breaks laws] appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

Now, many in the world have the mistaken idea that judgment is something that is way off in the future. That is only partially correct. However, for those called and chosen already their judgment, and therefore ours, because we are in that category, is taking place right now. So, brethren, here are our marching orders right in the book of I Peter chapter 4. It cannot be put off, nothing can do so, we are being judged by God.

How is your life going? This is serious stuff, because we are making judgments every, every [day?]. They are not all critical. I do not mean to imply that at all, but we are making judgments and somewhere in the scene is the law of God and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Are we glorifying Him? Are we giving Them the honor and respect that is due to Them by being a good witness? And our judgments are showing our witness to the world because people see what we are doing, They hear us talking, see our families, they watch us live.

God is permitting the nation's internal order to grow evermore likely to continue breaking down. It is only the verdict that will be coming later. That is why I called Trumpets a judgment day, and it is. The time for us is impending and growing ever-closer for us to take care of our responsibilities before God better than ever before. Please do not be overwrought because God is exceedingly merciful, and at the same time, thoroughly proficient in His acts of correction and creation.

So here is an important question. Does each of us know in fairly good detail what we need to be working on in order to continue toward the destination? It is on these things that we are being judged.

I Peter 2:1-3 [Here is part of our marching orders.] Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

We are in that position that I just described that Peter wrote in verse 11.

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims [That is what we are, we are pilgrims, we are on a pilgrimage even though we are not really moving anywhere.], abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles [I think you understand that the word Gentiles, except in specific situations, just is referring to unconverted people], that when they speak against you as evildoers [Sort of like Herod. He loved John the Baptist, but he cut his head off! Those people cannot be trusted.], they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

That is where we are headed—to the day of visitation.

So our goals on this journey we are on are set before us by God. He reveals them to us through sermons, Bible studies, private readings, and so forth. But one thing we must never do is let the ultimate goal, the Kingdom of God, must never be allowed to entirely slip from our minds (thinking mostly about these next five years or so). It may get pretty hectic politically. That goal must always be the major part of our focus because that is overall what God is preparing us for.