

Coach House Church BEACONS

RELAXING THE RULES

1ST JUNE 2020

Lockdown rules are starting to relax, but the danger is we forget the rules designed to keep us on the right path and relax so much we put ourselves at risk the Bible has quite a lot to say about over relaxing, although you may not see it as this at first glance.

I'm Andy, Pastor of the Coach House Church, and I want to look at how we should remain alert, even when we think we are out of the danger zone.

One of the most famous accounts in the Bible, which most people will have heard even if they haven't attended church at all, is the battle of Jericho.

After Joshua had crossed the River Jordan and entered the land that God had promised to them, the first obstacle that they encountered was the imposing fortified city of Jericho. The promises of God were ringing in their ears though, so in faith they followed Gods instructions , walked around the city for six days, before finally as they repeated this on the seventh day, the trumpets sounded, the people shouted and the walls of Jericho fell to the ground, never to be rebuilt again.

All good then in the camp of Joshua's men, you would have thought, given that the last line of the chapter describing this battle in the book of Joshua chapter 6 says:

Joshua 6:27 (NLT)

So, the LORD was with Joshua, and his reputation spread throughout the land.

But wait. Remember that I said this Beacon would be about over relaxing and becoming careless?

Someone in the camp, didn't follow the instructions given and took some objects for himself that god had declared should be kept separate and dedicated to God.

This is bad in itself and the Bible tells us that God was angry with the people of Israel because this had happened.

Even more careless and reckless however, was the decision to take on the next City in the way, the lesser city of Ai, with only a fraction of their army. Jericho had been easy, surely Ai will not pose a problem?

Joshua 7:2 (NLT)

Joshua sent some of his men from Jericho to spy out the town of Ai, east of Bethel, near Beth-aven. When they returned, they told Joshua, "There's no need for all of us to go up there; it won't take more than two or three thousand men to attack Ai. Since there are so few of them, don't make all our people struggle to go up there."

Perhaps this was the case and the argument put forward by the spies was accurate, but that is never an excuse for failing to enquire of God who had brought Joshua and the people this far. Remember that at Jericho the army had not even had to fight, just follow Gods instructions, march around the city for a few days, play some music, shout loud when told and that was it! Job done. Because Gods instructions were followed.

The problem we have with the Spies report and battle plan, was that it was their plan! They hadn't consulted God, they were so relaxed after the ease of the battle of Jericho, that they had begun to believe in their own strength and prowess.

The bigger problem however, is that Joshua agreed and let them get on with it! If he had consulted God, he would have found out that a man called Achan had disobeyed the instructions, had stolen some stuff for himself and God was angry! You see... Even Joshua was so relaxed about his perceived position with God, that he dropped his guard and the result was that the people of Israel were beaten back by the people of Ai. Joshua and his army and his plan, didn't succeed, and only then did he go to God to ask why? A bit late really and Joshua learnt a valuable lesson. Complacency can get you killed.

There are plenty of instances of this complacency and over relaxed attitude throughout the Old Testament – in fact it is an ever-present recurring theme, but don't just take my word for it...go and have a look for yourself. It is there for us to read and for our instruction.

Fast forward to the New Testament, and we read of the Apostle Paul's letters to various churches that he has helped to establish. In all of these letters we see the same recurring theme.

Don't go back to your old ways, push forward in the new things you have learnt about God and His son Jesus. Let the holy Spirit help you to keep on keeping on.

I'm paraphrasing quite a bit there, but you get the gist. We have to do some work in order to obey God, and all the time we are at the mercy of relaxing and taking our eye off the ball

Romans 7 v 21 has Paul saying to the believers in Rome:

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

What Paul is telling us here is that there is a battle going on between what we now know to be right (following God's instructions) and the way we want to be (self). I think we can all recognise the wisdom in Paul's words and if we are honest, we will all agree to knowing the battle ourselves.

It is when we relax and allow God to be pushed away a little in our thinking that we succumb to the old self – think of it in terms of the battle of Jericho and Ai and it might make more sense.

Paul also tells the church in Philippi to press on, push on, battle on.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NLT)

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

And here is the thing. I said right at the beginning that it was a case of not relaxing, keeping focussed, following the rules. God is revealed to us in his word and Paul tells us that it is Jesus' example that spurs us on to attain the prize ... And listen to this from the mouth of Jesus himself:

John 14:23-26 (NLT)

“All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

Jesus obeyed the Father, that is God. He didn't do his own thing. It is obedience, even to death on across, that sets Jesus the man apart from us. He spent time hearing His Fathers voice and then was obedient to it, and HE did nothing unless God told him to. I pray that we won't get to complacent in the coming weeks and months. Get to relaxed thinking that we are out of the woods and everything is OK. I pray even harder, that we will keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus and follow His example laid out for us. Following Gods rules may seem difficult and even antiquated in today's society. However, it is by obeying God rules that we will ultimately win victory and overcome our self.

We should never allow ourselves to relax and switch off from God. After all, he doesn't and won't switch off from You.



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