

UNSUNG HEROES

Part 7

PHINEHAS

“A Zeal for the Lord”

Numbers 25:1-13

ENGAGING the Audience

Fanatic! Extremist! Radical! Rebel!

How would you like to be known as a fanatic? How would it make you feel if someone described you as a radical? What if your colleagues thought of you as a rebel? What if your high school friends mocked you as an extremist?

Fanatics are crazy people. Extremists blow up buildings full of innocent people. Rebels buck the system every chance they get. Radicals believe and stand for dogmatic and unpopular convictions.

We don't want to be known as a crazy people? We don't want to be known as people who buck the system at every turn? We don't want to be known dogmatists - people who stand unpopular and polarizing convictions? We don't want to be known as an extremist?

The vast majority of us don't want our lives described or defined by these ideas.

Exploring the SCRIPTURE

Guess what?

This is exactly the kind of person our final hero was (minus blowing up buildings).

Our final hero was a fanatic. He was a rebel *with* a cause. Our hero was a radical who stood for a dogmatic conviction. Our hero was intense and passionate. He had fervor. He had enthusiasm. He was incredibly intense and fiercely passionate.

In Numbers 25:1-13, we find the story of our final UNSUNG HERO - Phinehas. Phinehas was the grandson of Aaron, Israel's first High Priest. Let's read together the story of Phinehas and see if we can't discover what made him a spiritual hero.

[Read Numbers 25:1-13]

Here's another great story that would make an awesome “guy” movie. Hollywood needs to make this movie. This is a Russell Crowe/Mel Gibson kind of movie.

In our UNSUNG HERO series, we've seen David decapitate Goliath in front of the Philistine army. We've seen Jael kill Sisera by driving a tent peg through his temple. Now, we've got Phinehas thrusting a spear through the midsection of a defiant Israelite and his foreign prostitute who are engaged in a rebellious act of immorality.

I know this sounds somewhat dysfunctional to some of you, but I dig this story. The passion and zeal of Phinehas resonates within my soul. I love the fierce passion and the brazen courage of Phinehas.

“What Is ZEAL?”

Do you know what it means to have zeal?

To be zealous means to be a fanatically committed person. To be zealous means to be intense and fiercely passionate. Zeal is fervor...it's an eager desire...it's an enthusiastic diligence. To be zealous means to stand for unpopular, and sometimes even polarizing, convictions. To have zeal is to be an extremist without shame or apology.

Phinehas was all these things.

Phinehas was radically committed to the Lord and His ways. Phinehas possessed a fierce passion for the testimony of God's glory among Israel and foreign nations. Deep within the soul of Phinehas was a fervor and desire for the holiness of God that burned white-hot. In the days of Israel's lukewarm commitment to God, Phinehas was a spiritual extremist.

What made Phinehas a spiritual hero? Phinehas was zealous for the Lord and His ways. Do you want to be a spiritual hero for the glory of God? If so, consider this...

Spiritual heroes are ZEALOUS for the Lord and His ways!

Are you radically committed to the Lord and His ways? Do you possess a fierce passion for the testimony of God's glory in your home and in your workplace? Is there a fervor and desire for the holiness of God that burns deep within your soul?

Asked differently...

Are you willing to be known as an extremist? Are you willing to be called a radical? Are you willing to be mocked at work and school for possessing a dogmatic, if not polarizing, belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ - a gospel that is inclusive in its offer, but exclusive in its means?

A spiritual hero answers “yes” to these questions.

“Discovering Our Zeal Meter”

Objectively discerning the level and intensity of our spiritual zeal is not always easy, is it? In fact, if the truth were known, there's a really good chance that we all think our zeal meter is higher than it actually is.

By looking closely at the heroic act of Phinehas, we can discover an objective way to measure our spiritual zeal on a daily basis. Phinehas gives us a zeal meter that will work every time.

Our zeal meter is a simple question that we must ask ourselves daily. Here it is...

“How do I respond when I'm confronted with defiant living and rebellious sin?”

Phinehas teaches us that one of the most accurate tests of a person's zeal for God is how he or she responds in the face of blatant, defiant, rebellious sin. Be forewarned, taking the Phinehas test can be - in fact, it will be - painful and convicting at times.

You see, the truth in each of our lives is this - we are not offended by sin like we should be. Everywhere we turn, sin rears its ugly head and attempts to lead us away from the holiness of God and His mandate of righteous living.

The truth is, we live in a world that is engulfed in sin. As a result, it is easy for us to become callous and indifferent to the offensive nature of sin.

“Failing the Phinehas Test”

Just the other night, Cathy and I were hanging out watching some television together. Like most men, I despise commercials. So, as soon as a commercial comes on I start channel surfing. There is little doubt in my mind that remote controls are one of the greatest inventions in the history of mankind. Can you imagine living without a remote control?

Anyways...

There I was, surfing the channels during a commercial, when I came across a popular movie on TNT. Before I knew what hit me, I found myself laughing at something I shouldn't have been laughing at.

Honestly, I found myself laughing at something that was sinful and offensive to God. My heart had become callous to the offensive nature of the material. I'm not proud to admit that to you. But...it's true.

Fortunately, I caught myself and turned the channel. However, the damage was done. I was embarrassed for my wife. More significantly, I realized that my zeal meter had dipped. To be honest with you, I was convicted and disappointed.

I failed the Phinehas test.

Something very different should have happened when I stumbled across the movie. Instead of laughing, I should have become jealous for God and His holiness. My heart and soul should have been grieved and offended. My zeal for God should have trumped my flesh. A holy indignation should have fanned into flame.

It didn't!

I was reminded this week that when my zeal for the Lord is lacking, sinful behavior will not offend me like it should. As Christians, sinful behavior should offend us and arouse intense jealousy within our souls for God.

Would you like to be a spiritual hero for the glory of God? Guard your heart against sin's attempt to inoculate your heart from its offensive nature. Satan wants nothing more than for Christians to become callous and indifferent to sin and its offensive nature. Satan wants to inoculate our mind and heart.

Back to Phinehas

Now, let's go back to Phinehas. What happened when Phinehas witnessed Zimri's blatant act of sin and rebellion? His zeal for the Lord and His ways aroused.

I want you to notice something. Notice what Phinehas didn't do. Phinehas didn't go to Zimri's tent and try to reason with him. Phinehas didn't enter Zimri's tent with the idea of negotiating and talking him out of his rebellious act. Phinehas did not appear at the threshold of Zimri's chamber as a harbinger of mercy and grace.

No! Notice that there is no record of Phinehas speaking any words.

The zeal of Phinehas was aroused into motion. The zeal of Phinehas catapulted him into holy action. Phinehas grabbed his spear and in one swift thrust through the midsection, he killed Zimri and his Midianite mistress.

This leads us to another principle regarding our zeal for the Lord.

Spiritual zeal displays itself most powerfully through our actions - not our words!

Now, let me offer you a disclaimer before we go any further. In no way am I encouraging you to be a vigilante. The Bible does not teach a vigilante justice system. Don't leave here this morning telling people that your pastor encouraged you inflict mortal justice and wounds on people living in sin. Leave your spears in the shed!

As Christians, we live under the banner of the New Covenant - a covenant of grace and mercy. We don't live under the Law of the Old Testament. We live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ our Savior. Thus, God does not expect us to wield spears and swords and execute justice on His behalf. God is more than capable of defending His holiness and righteousness.

However, when confronted with sin, God does expect us to live zealous lives.

Revealing a zeal for God through our words is easy. Living a life of zeal is hard. The truth is this; our righteous, zealous living can actually serve as a sharp sword of conviction in the lives of people who are defiantly choosing to live lives of sin and rebellion.

Many of us have people in our lives right now that are living like Zimri - living in open and defiant sin. Maybe it's a teenage and adult child? Maybe it's a spouse? Maybe it's a coworker? Maybe it's a friend or schoolmate? What these people need from us is not mere words; they need to witness a daily display of zealous and holy living.

Phinehas didn't talk about his zeal; he lived it out. Let me say it again, spiritual zeal is most powerfully displayed through our actions - not our words.

Would you like to be a spiritual hero for the glory of God? Display a holy zeal for God and His ways through your daily living.

“The Result of Phinehas' Zeal”

Before we wrap this series up, I want you to notice the result of Phinehas' zealous actions.

First, the zeal of Phinehas summoned the relenting and compassionate heart of God.

Look closely at Numbers 25:11.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel with my jealousy.’”

In his righteous and holy anger, God sent a plague upon Israel as judgment for their blatant and defiant rejection of His ways. Phinehas’ zealous act summoned the relenting and compassionate heart of God. If Phinehas had not zealously acted on behalf of the Lord, the number Israelites who would have died as a result of God’s judgment would have been far greater than 24,000. Only God knows how many lives were spared by the zealous passion of Phinehas.

Listen carefully!

When we display zeal for the Lord through our daily living, our zeal has the “potential” to summon the relenting and compassionate heart of God toward those that are living in defiant rejection of God. Righteous zeal has the potential to extend God’s grace and mercy to those we love that are living in open defiance of God - a child, a spouse, and sibling, or a friend.

Second, the zeal of Phinehas produced generational blessings.

Look closely at verse 12 and the blessing God bestows on Phinehas.

“Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to [Phinehas] my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.’”

Phinehas’ zealous act resulted in a generational blessing for his family. God promised Phinehas that all future and legitimate High Priests would come from his family line. Phinehas’ zeal for the Lord had a profound impact on his lineage for generations and generations to come.

Parents, one of the greatest gifts we can ever give our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren is a life that displays an unashamed zeal for the Lord and His ways.

“Wrapping It Up”

Of the seven churches of Asia Minor, none are more recognizable than the Church in Laodicea.

If you remember, Jesus accused Laodicea of being lukewarm. Their lukewarm living was so offensive to Jesus that He warned them that if they didn’t change quickly, He would vomit them out of His mouth.

Listen to what Jesus said to the Christians of Laodicea...

“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth.”

How did Laodicea become lukewarm?

In Revelation 3:19, we find our answer. Listen carefully to what Jesus commands Laodicea to do...

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”

According to Jesus, the remedy for Laodicea’s lukewarm Christianity is ZEAL! The Christians of Laodicea had become lukewarm because they had lost their zeal for the Lord and His ways.

According to Christ, there is no place for lukewarm Christianity in the Kingdom of God. Lukewarm faith is a tepid and bitter taste in the mouth of Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ to live zealously. We have been saved by grace through faith alone that we might live daily lives that display an unashamed zeal for God and His ways. We have been chosen by God to be spiritual heroes. Fulfilling our calling requires an unfading zeal for God.

Be a spiritual hero for the glory God.

Live a life that is zealous for Jesus Christ and His ways!