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Jeremiah Chapter 42

Have you seen the GEICO TV commercial about "Honest Abe" Lincoln? Mrs. Lincoln asked him the question that strikes fear into the heart of every husband: "Does this dress make me look fat?"

GEICO's objective for the ad is to convince us they are telling the truth about their discount. But what is the moral of the story about asking Honest Abe his opinion?

You didn't ask Honest Abe's opinion unless you were prepared for an honest answer. Now how does that tie into today's lesson?

Here's a truth:

You don't ask God for guidance unless you are prepared to hear the TRUTH and OBEY that guidance.

Question: Sometimes when we come to God for guidance, what are we REALLY seeking? His approval of our plans.

We've already made up OUR minds we just want his ENDORSEMENT of those plans.

Here's another truth:

God has a perfect will for our lives...NOT a "RUBBER STAMP" for our plans!

Some of the REMNANT of the people of Judah left behind in the exile didn't get that.

A little background on where we are:

- Most of the people of Judah have been exiled into captivity in Babylon
- A small REMNANT of people were left in their homeland in Mizpah...Jeremiah was one of them
- They were overseen by a provincial leader named Gedaliah
- But a resistance movement broke out and they assassinated Gedaliah
- Fearful of Babylonian retaliation a group of survivors made plans to flee to Egypt
- That brings us to Chapter 42 of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 42:1-3

1 Then all the army officers, including Johanan son of Kareah and Jezaniah[a] son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached 2 Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, "Please hear our petition and pray to the LORD your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left. 3 Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do."

Let's be sure to get the picture...

- These people were caught up in FEAR and CHAOS
- Jerusalem had been leveled in the final siege...it was a "smoldering pile of debris"
- A few former "military leaders took charge of the ragged remnant"
- When people are in a time of CRISIS, who do they usually go to see? God's man; or a Christian friend; or at least somebody who seems to have a Bible and act religious!
- When people are in this TIME OF FEAR and UNCERTAINTY, and they come to the Pastor or a friend asking for help in seeking God's guidance, how open are they usually to being obedient?

Jeremiah 42:5-6

5 Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the LORD your God sends you to tell us.

6 Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God."

- "Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God!"
- Pretty emphatic words!
- Modern day translation: "God, if you'll just get me out of this mess I'm in, I'll DO WHATEVER YOU SAY!"
- CAREFUL!
- Remember, Honest Abe?
- You didn't ask Honest Abe's opinion unless you were prepared for an honest answer.
- AND, You don't ask God for guidance unless you are prepared to OBEY that guidance.
- Ten days go by.
- God gives them TEN DAYS
- Question: We don't know the answer from the text...but why does God sometimes give us a little WAITING PERIOD before He answers our request for guidance?

Warren Wiersbe writes:

The Lord kept the people waiting for ten days, possibly to give them time to search their hearts and confess their sins. During those ten days, they could see that the Lord was caring for them and that they had nothing to fear. That should have convinced them that the plan to flee to Egypt was a foolish one.

- Ten days have passed and God has given Jeremiah the words to say

Jeremiah 42:9-10

9 He said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition, says: 10 'If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you.

- What was God's answer? Stay put!
- Verse 10: What promises did God make if they would obey?

- When God says "I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you" these are not "second thoughts" about God's judgement...scholars interpret this as God saying: "You've been punished enough...if you will obey me, I'll 'suspend your sentence'...give you 'time off for good behavior.'"
- For several verses Jeremiah paints the picture for these people
- If you obey God He will build you up...but if you disobey, God said "my wrath will be poured out on you when you enter Egypt."
- Question: Have you ever had a time that you asked for God's guidance and he didn't give you the answer you had in mind? How did it work out for you?

I've said many times: "If God gave me the pen to write the script of my life, I would have missed many wonderful blessings. I would have missed HIS BEST for me while trying to pursue MY PLAN."

- Have you ever RESISTED God's guidance and gone the other way? How did that go?
- Verse 19, Jeremiah makes God's instructions very plain:

Jeremiah 42:19-22

19 "O remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Be sure of this: I warn you today 20 that you made a fatal mistake[a] when you sent me to the LORD your God and said, 'Pray to the LORD our God for us; tell us everything he says and we will do it.'

- Verse 20 is Jeremiah's way of saying: "Don't ask for God's guidance if you don't intend to OBEY."
- But Jeremiah has begun to discern their real hearts
- Look at verses 21 and 22:

21 I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the LORD your God in all he sent me to tell you. 22 So now, be sure of this: You will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle."

- You seemed very sincere ten days ago when you asked me to seek God's will for you
- But I'm not blind! I can see that caravan of chariots and wagons out there in the road
- Those wagons and chariots are packed with your stuff and you've tied on signs that read: "EGYPT OR BUST"
- You have no intention of obeying God

Remember:

God has a perfect will for our lives...NOT a "RUBBER STAMP" for our plans!

- What happens when we IGNORE God's guidance for our lives?

Charles Stanley writes:

Plain and simple, those who willfully reject or ignore God's guidance are headed for trouble. They are also headed for God's discipline...Chastisement awaits those who reject God's direction...God does not delight in chastisement...God chastises His people to correct them so they will not experience the full consequences of their rebellion, sin, or error. His love for us and His desire to bless us compel Him to take action to keep us from our own self-destruction." (Walking Wisely p. 43)

- So, how did the leaders of this remnant respond to Jeremiah?
- Look at 43:2

Jeremiah 43:2

2 Azariah son of Hoshaiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, "You are lying! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, 'You must not go to Egypt to settle there.'

- Notice, they didn't come out and question God
- They accused Jeremiah of telling them the wrong thing in order to manipulate them
- In fact, if you read on in verse 3 they accuse Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe/secretary of INCITING Jeremiah to lie to them to keep them from going to Egypt
- When people don't get the guidance they want they will "shop" for the prophet who will tell them what they want to hear.

- So, how did the story end?
- It was jumping from "the fire into the frying pan"
- They went to Egypt...Jeremiah went with them...probably to try to do some damage control
- Nebuchadnezzar eventually invaded Egypt
- In Jeremiah 44:27 God said:
- 27 For I am watching over them for harm, not for good; the Jews in Egypt will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed.

So, What's The Takeaway?

- Sometimes when we come to God for guidance, what we are REALLY seeking is His approval of our plans.
- We've already made up OUR minds we just want his ENDORSEMENT.
- Are you at a crossroads and seeking God's guidance? Or are you just looking for a rubber stamp?
- We need to remember: God has a perfect will for our lives...NOT a "RUBBER STAMP" for our plans!
- You don't ask God for guidance unless you are prepared to OBEY that guidance.
- Those who reject God's guidance are headed for trouble!

