

Paraklēsis: High Places...

You've heard or read the term "high places," right? The term is used 117 times in the Bible. I didn't count them, I read it on the internet. So, it might not be true. But in reading through Kings and Chronicles recently, I was struck by the number of times it is mentioned. What I started recording as I read were the instances recounting "... **king So-and-So did what was right in the eyes of God, but he did not tear down the high places.**" So-and-So was one of the few "Good Kings," but he wasn't perfect. Well, after a bit of research, I think Hezekiah and Josiah were the only two kings that did tear down the high places – and they were not perfect either. Only one King was perfect.

My first thoughts were questioning, how could these kings be doing what was right in God's eyes, but leaving these bad things? I mean, look at all the good things they did... why not just finish the job? Take Asa, for example. He banished the cult prostitutes and destroyed the idols. He deposed his mother as queen and destroyed the idol she had made. **Asa left the high places and yet, his heart was perfect;** he was wholly devoted, depending on your translation.

I am seeing that "**high places**" are not necessarily bad. David worshipped at the high place in Gibeon. But this was before there was a temple built. I think that the temple Solomon built can be called a high place – or maybe The High Place... the official place of worship. The problem with the high places that were not torn down by these Good Kings is that they were generally used for pagan worship. And, many (or most, or all...?) of the high places that needed to be torn down were places associated with temple prostitutes. God so often condemns His people for committing adultery by "whoring after other gods." (read Hosea 4) **We are being prepared as a bride for the Groom.** We need to be spiritually faithful to Him just as we need to be physically faithful to our spouses.

When Hezekiah tore down the high places, scripture also tells us that "he trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses." (2Ki 18:5-6) **Hezekiah trusted and clung to and followed God.** And God blessed him for all his life, plus 15 years.

But what about the other Good Kings, the ones that did not tear down the high places? They were also blessed, and their hearts were "perfect" (like Asa.) God was not pleased with their decision to leave the high places, but He did not seem to condemn or punish them for it.

So, what does this all mean for us? We have dominion over our life and have the choice to purge our "territory" of the evil that exists therein. **Are we Good Kings, but leave the high places?** Or, do we cling to Him and trust Him in all things and follow Him and keep His commandments? Is being a Good King good enough? "Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (1Co 3:12-15) Does it make sense that building our house with straw is like leaving the high places where they stand? Does it make sense that building our house with gold, silver, and precious stones is like chasing after God's own heart?

How do we find our high places? In this season of the Passover, 1Cor 11:28 tells us to examine ourselves judging our worthiness. But, I think this should be a frequent exercise that we go through. We would do no harm in **continually examining our worthiness**, considering and determining what our high places are – and tearing them down. Here are some ideas. First, believe that **we should be chasing after God's own heart**, we should be committed to pursuing perfection – like Messiah says:

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mat 5:48)

Without tearing down the high places, we will not be perfect. If the high places are invisible or hidden from us, **we need help finding them**. We can get help from God:

And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. (James 1:4-6)

Or we can get help from The Body:

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (Jas 5:16)

For years I have struggled, and still do, with memories of the life I led and the sins I committed in the past. I know in my head that God hates sin, and I should, too. But, that beastly, fleshly man that still lurks in my conscience oftentimes dredges up those carnal memories. Whenever that happens, I have a choice. I can dwell on the memory and bask in the glorious, sensual experience I had and pine for the good old days. Or, I can press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It really is my choice. **I can choose to climb up and stand on the high place, or I can tear it down**. Usually, I am not capable to accomplish the latter on my own. I need the mercy and strength of God and His spirit. And I need to ask for it. But, it really is that easy. Ask and you shall receive.

Some great words from Paul... *"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." (Php 3:12-16)*

Paul pointed out that the high places are an issue to contend with and, in this physical life, always will be. I believe that the biggest struggle we face is only finding the humility within ourselves to ask God for help when we are faced with that choice to climb up on or tear down.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against **spiritual wickedness in high places**. (Eph 6:12)

Peace to you and Glory to God,

-Nate

www.paraklesis.net