

Passing the Torch

Judges 2:1-10

The Olympic flame is the most recognized symbol of the Olympics, dating back to the Games of ancient Greece, when athletes competed in a relay race, passing a torch from one to another until the last runner, in a long procession of runners, would sprint to the top of the stadium and light the flame to signal the beginning of the competition.

For many years the flame was extinguished due to neglect, world turmoil and other events but it was officially reignited in 1928. The idea of the marathon relay, where runners would once again carry the torch, was revived in 1936 for the Berlin Games. The relay began at the location of ancient Olympia and ended in Berlin, Germany after passing through seven countries and covering a total of 3,050 km. The journey of the torch took 12 days and 13 nights, and 3,331 torchbearers each took a turn at carrying it along the way.

From then on, the Olympic Torch Relay has remained an important part of the Olympic tradition and the torchbearer is the person who is honored by carrying the Olympic Flame. The flame carries a message as it passes through each town, city and village. It announces that the games are about to begin; it embodies and spreads the ideals of the Olympics and speaks of the union and peace amongst the people, the allegiance, the courage, the fraternity and solidarity of all of the competitors.

As we saw last week, God has handed to each of us a torch to bear for him. We read God's word to us from Philippians 2:15 that said, **that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.** That torch is the light of the Gospel, the knowledge of God and His ways, and the Word of God. It is put into our hands and our hearts by the Holy Ghost and the fire is ignited so that we may burn as lights in a sin darkened world. Each of us are to let our light shine that all men can see Jesus in us and then we are told to run with it and to pass it on to the next generation.

God gave Israel a torch to bear too. In Deuteronomy 6:4-7 Moses instructed the people, **"4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."**

Israel was to live God's Word and pass the torch to the next generation. But it didn't happen that way. As a result, each new generation had to suffer, and many would die. Each generation was forced to walk in darkness until somehow God's light would be ignited once again.

I want us to examine an incident in the journey of Israel to see why they were unable to pass the torch the way that they were supposed to. Why was it that each passing generation had to so suffer so much? All of the suffering, dying and wandering into idolatry can be traced back to Israel's failure to do what God said to do in the first place.

Judges 2:1-5

1 Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you.

2 And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?

3 Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.' "

4 So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.

5 Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord.

Verse one says **"Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim."** Let me remind you what happened at Gilgal. In the book of Joshua, Gilgal was the first place Israel had camped after entering the Promised land and there they set up 12 memorial stones, for there God rolled away their reproach. It was the place of circumcision, where all those born in the wilderness were circumcised. In the New Testament, circumcision is a picture of the putting off of the flesh Col. 2: 11 says **"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ."** At Gilgal they first celebrated the Passover in the new land.

It was at Gilgal, when Joshua stood before Jericho and its great walls, that he looked to one side and saw a Man with a sword drawn in His hand. Joshua asked if the Man was for or against Israel. That identified himself as "Captain of the Lord's Host" or "Commander of the Lord's Army". Joshua knew this was the Lord Himself, and he fell down on his face and worshipped Him. He spoke to Joshua the same words the Lord had spoken Moses at the burning bush, **"Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy."** This was the Lord, the great I AM that I AM that spoke to Joshua.

Now this same Angel of the Lord comes up from Gilgal to speak to Israel again. The Angel of the Lord was not merely "an angel," a created being; He was a theophany—an appearance of the Lord Himself. The Angel of the Lord appears at significant times in Israel's history. He appeared twice in Genesis—to Hagar and to Abraham, the two major lines from Abram. He appeared in Exodus at the calling of Moses, in Numbers at the rescue of Israel from Balaam -- and now, as Israel is passing the torch to a new generation in the Promised Land. I believe Him to be the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ the Son of God, in visible and bodily form before the Incarnation. He will appear two more times in Judges.

Gilgal, was a place of victory and power because God was with them. But Israel couldn't stay at Jericho. There were a lot more battles to fight and more enemies to defeat before they could claim their inheritance. In the first chapter of the Book of Judges you can see a summary of the battles that they fought. At first they did well, obeying the commandments to drive out their enemies, but then they began to compromise more and more until they stopped driving out the enemy and started making peace treaties with them.

So the Lord confronts them in their compromise and says, **"I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. 2 And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this?"** He reminds them that they are the covenant people. He reminds them of their relationship to Him and what He has done for them.

And He confronts them in their compromise. God had told them to drive out every inhabitant of the Promised Land. He had said that if they would cleanse the land of every idol and every idolater, if they would cut down the groves and altars that were built to honor those idols, and if they would keep themselves pure and obedient to his commandments, that God would help them to be victorious and give them their land just as he had promised to Abraham so many years before. God's promise had not failed. He had brought them through in his own time and in his own way so that Israel, and the whole world, could only say that it was God's miracle working power that had done it. The power of man, the arm of the flesh, had no part in God's deliverance.

But did Israel listen to what God had to say? No they didn't! They only heard the part that they wanted to hear! They only heard the part that sounded good to their ears and satisfied their own desires! All they heard was that God would give them their Promised Land. They never heard the part about driving out the inhabitants. At least, if they did hear, they didn't obey what God had said because they not only let the idolaters stay in the land, they actually joined them in their worship of idols.

That's the greatest obstacle we face in our job of carrying the torch to the next generation. It is the obstacle of "compromising with the enemy". Were the instructions of God too hard to understand? Didn't they hear what God had said? Why did they quit doing what they were supposed to and drive out their enemies?

It's the same reason that Christians still do so today. It's all because they didn't keep the fire burning brightly and they lost their closeness to the God. The more victories they had, the more they began to rely upon self than upon God for those victories. How often do we think that we won the battle and forget that it is God who is doing the fighting?

Just like Israel we begin to believe that we can coexist with our enemy rather than drive him out like God said to do. We can still enjoy the world, but continue to live for God. We can walk the fence without falling off. We think we can live for God and enjoying the pleasures of sin and the world at the same time. Then, when we fall off the fence, it's always into the side of the world because you can't fall into God's path; you have to choose to step into it. The natural draw upon our flesh is to go into the world, not to follow God. If you are going to follow God it has to be because you have purposed in your heart to do so. It will never happen by accident and it will never happen by chance. It always by decision!

From Gilgal, the "angel of the Lord" comes to Bochim. Bochim was probably located between Bethel and Shiloh, some 20 mi from the Dead Sea. Now that the Children of Israel have left the path of victory where they were commanded to walk and have begun to compromise, they are suddenly finding that they have constant trouble and constant battles all the time and it has brought them great sorrow. That's what Bochim means, "the place of weeping".

I've seen this in the church. So many people will begin to walk in victory with the Lord, but because they lay down the torch and begin to compromise with the world, falling off

of the fence back into the old life, their victory is gone and now there is nothing but troubles and sorrow. God still loves them, but they have lost their love for God and have chosen to love the world instead.

A prime example of someone who throws aside the torch was a man named Demas who once walked with Paul in the early church.

In Colossians 4:14 we read where Demas and Luke are working together for the Lord. Both are carrying the torch of the gospel to the world. But something happens and later we read in 2 Timothy 4:10 where Paul says, "**for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...**" and then he says; "**Only Luke is with me.**" Demas was a man who once preached alongside Luke and Paul, but went back into the world and cast the torch aside.

Demas didn't have to go back into the world, none of us are forced to throw down the torch, and Israel wasn't given more than they could bear either. They simply allowed compromise to sap their victory and then let go of the torch, allowing the light to go out in their souls.

Not only did this generation miss out on God's best, but their failure to pass the torch to their children would cost the next generation dearly.

The Lord spoke again to Israel in Judges 2:3, "**Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'**"

Israel, why didn't you drive out the enemy like you were commanded to do? Why did you compromise instead?

There was no answer that Israel could give, no excuse for their actions, other than they had become hard-hearted and rebellious, disobedient children.

We can make all the excuses we want to for our compromises with the world. We can rationalize anything we do and try to make it seem like it's always someone else's fault or just adverse circumstances that "force" us to make the wrong choices, but the reality of it all is that we simply choose to compromise rather than pay the price of obedience. God knows our heart and our motives. We don't fool him with excuses.

Israel cried when they heard the convicting words of God. They knew that they had done wrong and that they had no excuse. They were caught in their own sin. So they began to cry out for forgiveness and built an altar to sacrifice to God.

At least this generation still had enough of the love of God in them that they were willing to repent and turn back to God.

What about you and me? What about this present generation of Christians in our modern church? I believe that many of us have enough of God's love in us that we can recognize where we are failing God and we can turn back to him. God will honor our prayer. He will meet us at the altar. And he will forgive us of our sin and help us to win the victory again.

But what about the next generation? What are they learning from us? Are we passing the torch of the gospel and serving the Lord on to them?

Judges 2:6-10, "**And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land. 7 So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua,**

who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. 8 Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. 9 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. 10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel."

The generation of Israelite that had experienced the fall of Jericho, and the parting of the waters of the Jordan River, and had seen the cities of their enemies fall, one after another, went on to serve the Lord until the whole generation passed from this world to the next.

But what legacy did they leave for the next generation? Had they carried the torch and passed it on to their children? Would the next generation be as faithful? Would they serve the Lord as their parents had done in the end?

Sadly it didn't happen that way. The next generation of Israel didn't know God in the same way as their parents and they quickly forgot about the things that God had done for the last generation.

The light of God was cast aside and darkness settled over Israel. Gross darkness covered the land as the next generation began to live even more compromised lives than their parents had done.

That's the way sin works. The more we compromise, the more we want to compromise, until we are so far from God that we can't see him, hear him or desire to serve him. It's just like missing church, not reading the Bible or failing to pray. The more we fail to do those things, the less we care to do them at all, until finally, we are lost in the world of sin once again.

But I wonder how many people will miss Heaven because their parents chose to live in the world? Even though we may raise them right and try to pass the gospel torch on to our children, there is no guarantee that they will choose to carry it. But if we don't live for the Lord, there is little chance for our children.

How could a nation that had experienced all of the miracles that God had done for Israel, and had seen the presence of God in the pillar of fire and cloud, and had known the power of God in such greatness, not pass along the torch of the knowledge and love of God to their children?

It seems so impossible that the very next generation after Joshua's generation, would completely forget God and not know about anything that God had done in the past. Could it be that Israel failed to talk about God in the home?

We can talk about Jesus, claim to know and love him, and say that we are serving him, but are our actions proving it to be true? The next generation will learn from what we do more than from what we say. Are we passing the torch?

We can't allow the devil to steal our children and grandchildren. We can't allow the light of the gospel to be extinguished. We must do everything we can to be a torchbearer and then to try to pass that light on to the next generation as well.