

Title: Affirmation or suspicion - Joshua 22

Purpose: To probe ourselves that we might know whether we tend to bring people together or push people apart.

INTRODUCTION

Q. What sort of people are we?

I want this morning to start with a question - and this is a question which seeks to discern what sort of people we really are.

It is a question that this passage before us of Joshua 22 poses.

It is one that probes us down deep - it is one of those questions that we probably have to retire to a quiet corner and think about - it is the question:

Q. When it comes to dealing with other people - what sort of person am I?

And by that I mean:

- Q. Am I someone who more naturally **builds others up**
OR one who more easily **breaks people down?**
- Q. Do I tend to easily **heap praise on others**
OR am I usually one who is good at **highlighting their problems, their deficiencies?**
- Q. Do I more readily **push people apart**
OR do I tend to **bring them together?**

Our structure

As we look at this 22nd chapter in Joshua the story, the action, divides quite naturally into 2 parts, which are in a sense quite contrasting.

So for our time this morning I want to break things down under 2 headings (I always think it's good to try and let people know where we're going - at least in a rough sense - I guess in this way you are able to follow along a little bit better):

So two parts:

- **FIRSTLY** - what I'm calling: **Affirmation & Accountability - Things that UNITE (Verses 1-9)**
- & then **SECONDLY**: **Suspicion & Assumption - Things that DIVIDE (Verse 10-34)**

So let's not dilly dally around - let's get straight in - so #1:

1] Affirmation & Accountability - Things that UNITE (Verses 1-9)

Now the whole chapter is all to do with THE 2 AND A HALF TRIBES, that group that geographically have their land on the **East Side of the Jordan** - they comprise: **the tribes of Reuben & Gad and then what they call the half-tribe of Manasseh.**

(They call it a "half-tribe" - ***not because*** it is less than a proper tribe in any sense (in fact it is a very substantial tribe with a lot of land assigned to it) ***but because*** it is a full-blown tribe that is simply split in 2 by way of its dual location:

- ONE HALF dwells in the **LAND OF CANAAN** on the **West side of the Jordan**
- & THE OTHER HALF that dwell and have their inheritance) on the **East side of the Jordan** in the area that here is called simply **GILEAD**

A matter getting some CLOSURE

Now Joshua 22 is, in a sense, the beginning of the end, as far as the book of Joshua is concerned - and given that chapters 23-24 have to do with Joshua and his farewell - this chapter is essentially rounding off something that was started right at the beginning of Joshua in chapter 1 - so although you might think that something is here being introduced late on in the book - in fact this is **a matter that is finally getting some CLOSURE**.

The background for what we are meeting with here in Joshua **starts in Numbers 32** and that was why we read it earlier on so that we would all have the background to things. It really does help to know the history behind things if we are going to be able to think rightly about a subject.

What I want to do now is to read first the end of chapter 1 and then follow it up with the opening few verses of chapter 22 so then:

Joshua 1 verses 12-18 "But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, ¹³ "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.' ¹⁴ Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers ¹⁵ until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

¹⁶ Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

Joshua 22 verses 1-3 "Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh ² and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. ³ For a long time now—to this very day—you have **not deserted your brothers** but have carried out **the mission** the LORD your God gave you.

So then, as you see, things are finally coming full-circle and this is one more of **God's "LOOSE ENDS"** that is being picked up and closed off.

A big "Well done, good and faithful servant"

As I read those opening verses in Chapter 22 - there were **a couple of similar parables of Jesus** that came to my mind - it was the parable of the talents and also the parable of the 10 minas.

And in each of the parables a master gives money or resources to his servants and goes away from a long time. When he comes back there is a reckoning that goes on to see how they have fared with the money that has been entrusted to their care.

And for those that have done well, for those that have been good stewards of the money - they received a

"Well done, good and faithful servant!"

And this is always one of the nicest things that you can hear - though, that said, it might be one of the rarest things that we hear. And I'm not saying that because we very rarely ever do well - but simply because

AFFIRMATION is *not* something that we tend to do very much of.

Their mission

Joshua could have handled the 2 and-a-half tribes very differently and maybe that would have been what we would have done. Effectively - all that needed to happen was for Joshua to send them home now that the work was done.

So he could have said:

"Ok guys - as you know the work has dried up and, well, there's really now nothing that's keeping you here - so this is essentially farewell. Good luck, go steady and **Auf Wiedersehen** (or as the Jews would have put it **SHALOM!**)"

So let's just look a little closer at Verses 2&3:

"...You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. ³ For a long time now—to this very day—you have **not deserted your brothers** but have carried out **the mission** the LORD your God gave you."

- **FIRST** - Joshua acknowledges their **ACHIEVEMENT**.

Simply being faithful in something **IS AN ACHIEVEMENT** - it **IS** something that is worth RECOGNISING. I suppose just because we CARRY SOMETHING may often not look like much.

BUT Joshua here notes it - (not merely as it concerns their fulfilment of what Moses had stipulated) BUT ALSO in regard to doing everything that Joshua himself had requested.

It's a mistake to think that unless someone EXCELS in some way you can't or you shouldn't give them PRAISE and RECOGNITION.

- **SECOND** - Joshua **OBSERVES** that what they have done has **not been done quickly**.

If you been in business, perhaps in a large company, you will probably have witnessed a small ceremony when someone gets what they call: "**A LONG SERVICE AWARD**" - perhaps someone has been in the company for 20 or 30 years and so they get given **a gold clock** OR PERHAPS some **lead crystal glassware** and usually they inscribe some sort of message on it.

As Verse 3 says "For a long time now - to this very day - you have not deserted your brothers but have carried

out the mission the LORD your God gave you."

The fact that he says "you have **not deserted** your brothers..." does tend to imply that **he realises that there must have been many temptations** in that department.

Look around you - think of people that have been doing a job for a really long time and they haven't ever given up. Often it can be the "not very dramatic jobs" - like taking chairs off the stage and putting them back. Like counting the money and paying it into the bank week in and week out, it could be making sure the church has tea and coffee and that there are clean tea cloths for washing up every week.

It can be such an encouragement to a person that someone else has actually mentally clocked some of the real life facts of what they do and continue to do.

- **THIRD** - Joshua **describes** it here (as the **NIV** has it) as a **MISSION**.

Joshua is recognising that this service they have been undertaking is **something that God is in, something that God has called them to do**.

We might describe it as a **God-given MINISTRY**.

- **FOURTH** - see how Joshua **lavishes BLESSING UPON THEM**.

Now we should be clear that Joshua is **not merely saying nice things just for the sake of it**. These are **not**, I think, rather empty and superficial words of **FLATTERY**. Joshua is **not** the sort of person just to **BUTTER THEM UP** so that they will always remain sweet.

This is truly a reflection of the fact that **Joshua wants these people to FLOURISH** and he knows that that will come through the blessing of God.

It is worth noticing that **as part of that BLESSING** he is **telling them to SHARE!**

Joshua knows from past history that soldiers returning to their homes have often been unwilling to share with those men who have stayed at home guarding the towns and the supplies.

So Joshua is keen that the fullness of their well deserved blessing will not be **JEOPARDIZED IN ANY WAY**.

- Let me make one **FINAL** observation - and that is that Joshua **HAS THEIR LONG TERM GOOD IN MIND**. Joshua is **very keen that their blessing will always remain**.

Joshua knows that just because someone has done well in one setting, it does not automatically guarantee that things will indefinitely go on in that same way especially when the circumstances change.

The two and a half tribes might go home and then say to themselves, well we have fighting wars now for over 7 years and you know what **WE NEED TO LET DOWN OUR GUARD and TAKE IT A BIT EASY**.

But there is no such thing as having a holiday from following and serving God.

There is no such thing as retirement as a Christian.

So see what Joshua does - let me read [verse 5](#)

"But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: **to love** the Lord your God, **to walk** in all his ways, **to obey** his commands, **to hold fast** to him and **to serve** him **with all your heart and all your soul.**"

These are a little bit like David when he goes to the stream and picks up **5 SMOOTH STONES** that will be what he needs to face any Goliath that might come his path.

Q. I wonder whether you know **the kind of SMOOTH STONES** that you need for sustaining a LIVELY CHRISTIAN WALK?

I presume you know there's treasure in these 5 STONES - you realize that actually their gems. They're a bit deceptive just because they seem a little bit too ordinary looking. But is it not these sorts of things that we somehow lose hold of.

The Ephesians lost their FIRST LOVE.

Joshua is actually not very original in what he says here - perhaps you might recall what Moses has to say in one of his farewell sermons when the new generation was camped on the plains of Moab just over the Jordan:

[Deuteronomy 10 verse 12&13](#):

"And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but **to fear** the LORD your God, **to walk** in all his ways, **to love** him, **to serve** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and **to observe** the LORD'S commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?"

He is passing on what you might call "OLD WISDOM" - wisdom that has passed the test of time - it is an act of SAFEGUARDING ***** in fact this is the aspect of ACCOUNTABILITY. *****

We should never think that OLD WISDOM is too obvious to bother passing on - for it is such that **it never grows old - it is ever new!!**

[Tim Keller](#) - speaking in this area of AFFIRMATION - draws a number of ways that we can commonly AFFIRM people by looking at about a dozen of the "one another" - "each other" verses in the NT. **He divides them into 3 sections**:

AFFIRMATION (Taking nothing away)

1. AFFIRM one another's strengths, abilities, and gifts:

- [Romans 12:10](#): "Honour one another"
- [James 5:9](#): "Don't grumble against each other"
- [Romans 12:3-8](#): which he simply sums up as: "Confirm the gifts of one another"

2. AFFIRM one another's equal importance in Christ:

- [Romans 15:7](#): "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you"

- [1 Corinthians 12:25](#): “Have equal concern for each other”
- [1 Peter 5:5](#): “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another”
- [James 2:1](#): “Don’t show favouritism”

3. **AFFIRM one another through visible affection:**

- [Romans 16:16](#): “Greet one another with a holy kiss”
- [James 1:19](#): “Be quick to listen, slow to speak”
- [Ephesians 4:32](#): “Be kind and compassionate to one another”
- [1 Thessalonians 3:12](#): “[May] your love increase and overflow for each other”

John Piper - writing his forward to a book on **Christian Affirmation** has this to say:

" The absence of affirmation for God’s handiwork in his people is also a kind of sacrilege—for at least three reasons:

FIRST, it is disobedience to God’s command: “A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30). And I can’t think of any reason why this does not apply in principle to God-fearing men.

SECOND, it demeans Jesus as though he were stooping to do something unworthy when he says, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21, 23). If he says it, should we consider it beneath us to say it?

THIRD, all the works of God are worthy of praise. And there is no good in anyone but by the work of God."

So if AFFIRMATION is a great God-given duty this should be matched, twinned with ACCOUNTABILITY - because by seeking to hold people ACCOUNTABLE we are simply desiring to SAFEGUARD all the good works and gains that people have thus far achieved in their lives.

Well these are two things that have a wonderful power to keep us together, things that unite us with the powerful CEMENT OF GOD'S GRACE.

Q. When last did you think of AFFIRMING somebody or take steps to protect their progress by keeping them ACCOUNTABLE?

I want now to head on from AFFIRMATION and ACCOUNTABILITY to what I have called #2:

2] Suspicion & Assumption - Things that DIVIDE (Verse 10-34)

Now you could be forgiven for thinking that because these two and half tribes are so well spoken of here that nothing could possibly go wrong.

BUT oh how **wrong you would be!!**

If AFFIRMATION and ACCOUNTABILITY are rather rare plants that need careful nurturing in a spiritual greenhouse - **SUSPICION** and **MISTRUST** are common all garden plants that can pretty well flourish anywhere - to be honest we shouldn't really be calling them garden plants - they are WEEDS!!

The Two and half disciples

Let me for a moment PARALLEL the two and half tribes in the OT with the two and half disciples in the NT.

Now I know you are thinking to yourselves - two and half disciples - how is that possible?

I am here thinking of James and John - Q. Where does the half come from? Well I am adding in their Mother - whom we believe might have been the lady with the name Salome.

Remember the episode where these disciples come to Jesus with their mother - so we'll count her as worth half a disciple and Q. Do you remember their request to Jesus that they might be allowed, when Jesus returns, to be allocated a special place of CHOICE RESIDENCE? One at the left-side of Jesus and the other on the right-side.

And the other disciples when they heard about this request were somewhat indignant with them. (If the truth be known they were probably a bit mad because they had not thought to do the same thing themselves!)

Probably after this they might have held James and John **with a bit of SUSPICION**.

In our minds from this point we separate them out - somehow they are made different from everybody else - because they have been capable of this - they are in a **new category** - they are **somehow LABELLED!**

Reubenites & Gadites

Now one thing that you might not particularly have spotted when we read Joshua 22 is the fact that for most of the chapter is talks about the two and half tribes (so that's Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh).

HOWEVER - and here's what perhaps seems a little strange, if you notice it at all - is that in the final 3 verses of the chapter - the reference is only to the Reubenites and the Gadites.

If you trace things back to Numbers 32, it does appear that it is with these 2 tribes that things began and it suggests that even though they are now the two and a half tribes - people have long memories and it is much easier to pull apart than stick together.

If you think it through - SUBTRACTING the name Manasseh from things completes the SEPARATION, because of course Manasseh is also represented on the West side in the land of Canaan.

- So very easy to just say Reubenites and Gadites and link them to the single geographical term **GILEAD**
- and then also have the other 10 tribes including Manasseh and apply the CONTRASTIVE term **CANAAN**

And evidently this is a genuine worry that the two and half tribes have and why they go ahead and build this large altar of witness.

It is also interesting to wonder whether it was God's wisdom to Moses that Manasseh would be added in because they would keep the connection active. That the tribe of Manasseh would function as a bridge.

Q. I wonder whether you sometimes perform **A BRIDGE FUNCTION** - keeping people **GLUED** into the rest of the fellowship?

SUSPICION and **MISTRUST** can be very easy things to allow to flourish in our minds - but they can be very dangerous if we entertain them UNCRITICALLY.

ASSUMPTION

So you know the story - the two and a half-tribes get to the border and before they cross over to the other side they make what is described as **an IMPOSING ALTAR** (Verse 10).

Well it is not long before news gets around in CANAAN that this is what they have done and the reaction was a pretty swift one:

Verse 12 "the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them."

It all seems pretty crazy but that's what happens. HOWEVER, to their credit they don't muster troops, they first put together a representative, high-level delegation to go and speak to them.

HOWEVER **before we get too impressed** with their "MEASURED RESPONSE" - we should observe that they **pretty well go in with "GUNS BLAZING"**.

Their opening words are: "How could you break faith..." (Verse 16)

- They liken what they are doing to the terrible SIN OF THEIR FATHERS when they lapsed into great immorality and idolatry with the Moabites and 24,000 fell dead from a plague
- IF THAT WERE NOT ENOUGH - they then liken what they are doing to the more recent SIN OF ACHAN that caused the Israelites to get defeated by the men of Ai

So they could not really have used much more forceful words if they had tried.

One of the problems with FORCEFUL WORDS - is that they tend to draw forth words from the other side which are SIMILARLY FORCEFUL.

See how they respond:

Verse 21-23 "Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel:
'The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows! And let Israel know!
If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the Lord, do not spare us this day.
If we have built our own altar to turn away from the Lord and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the Lord himself call us to account.'"

It is a pretty powerful tri-fold name combination calling upon God to be their witness.

(In fact there only one other place where this name combination comes up and that is Psalm 50)

Amazing how fast the direction of the story changes

I think you will agree that it is amazing in this chapter of Joshua 22 - just how fast the plot direction can change.

It is like the sun is blazing down one minute and the next - it is thunder and lightning and then just a few moments later on it is back to a cloudless sky!!

I feel pretty sure that you have experienced the same sort of dramatic change in your own experience:

- something happens - maybe some comment is made by someone about something a close friend of yours said and you are devastated. You decide you won't respond to their txts - you will keep your distance

Well eventually the bubble bursts and you discover that you were not in full possession of the facts and that turns the whole situation on its head. Q. Ever happened to you?

- So what is the problem? It all comes down to ASSUMPTION - you say to yourself $2+2 = 4$ and you are

convinced about how terrible something or someone is EXCEPT that you are wrong, you are misled, you are missing some vital piece of information that will alter the whole thing.

SUSPICION & ASSUMPTION have such combined power to DIVIDE PEOPLE.

CONCLUSION

So we end where we began with the baseline question:

Q. When it comes to dealing with other people - what sort of person am I?

Which is:

- Q. One who naturally **builds others up**
OR one who more easily **breaks people down?**
- Q. One who easily **heaps praise on others**
OR one who is pretty accomplished at **highlighting their problems, their deficiencies?**
- Q. Are you successful at **pushing people apart**
OR are you becoming accomplished at **bringing them back together?**

This chapter gives you I would suggest wise advise that is the Christ-like way:

- learn to practice AFFIRMATION and allying this with a healthy eye to encouraging a right ACCOUNTABILITY

hand in hand with this:

- learn to avoid the MUCH EASIER TEMPTATIONS to:

SUSPICION & ASSUMPTION

how much we lose

So - Q. What sort of person are you => **MASTER BUILDER** or **DEMOLITION CONTRACTOR?**