

Christ is Risen... **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

...as follows in Jesus' name:

And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And He sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and He saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He said, "Because this people have transgressed My covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed My voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not." So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Christian parents desire their children to be Christians throughout their lives; this is the natural course.

If you yourself believe that Jesus is your Savior and the only way of salvation and eternal life,

then you also believe that Jesus is their Savior and their only way of salvation and eternal life,

and so you desire that they would know their one and only Savior and what He did/does to save.

No doubt the original generations that saw what the Lord had done through Moses and Joshua desired the same for their families.

And yet, we are told in these introductory paragraphs to the book of Judges,

that there arose another generation after them

who did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel. ...

They abandoned the Lord.

And then on top of that we hear, that even when the Lord sent judges to save them,

They did not listen to the judges...

They turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.

They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways.

So how does such a thing happen when Christian parents desire their children to be Christians, too?

There is a meme out there that has a picture of four generations of a family,
the great-grandfather has the phrase - Church is essential,
the grandfather has the phrase - Church is optional,
the father has the phrase - Church is unnecessary,
the son has the phrase - Jesus who?

Obviously, the meme is a generality but it recognizes a truism:
the less important Jesus is considered to be by one generation,
the less priority the next generation gives to Him,
until finally, He isn't even known at all.

The Lord has given us this summary of the book of Judges so that we might learn and understand
how weak our flesh is and how susceptible we are to falling into the same ungodliness that they did.

Now, today we do not have idols set up to Baal or Ashtaroath around us,
so there is probably little chance that these will be enticing to us or our children.
But there are plenty of other idols around us... things that we trust to give us happiness/security.
But maybe the word "idol" doesn't mean much to you, because you don't bow down to anything.
What if, instead of using the word "idol" or "god", we used the word "priorities."
What priorities do you have in this life? What is your greatest priority?
Do all other priorities fade into the background, compared to your highest priority?
Would others, who know and watch you, agree with what you say is your highest priority?
Or have other idols – I mean priorities – started to crowd it out?

Individuals and families these days are tempted to have lots of "priorities."
You can tell by the sheer mass of activities that are on your calendars.
You can also tell by the transactions that fill your bank account ledgers, either title/amount/both.
When there is a conflict between you or your family's being in God's presence
and hearing His Word and receiving His sacraments, which wins out?
Do you choose to neglect God's presence or do you neglect the other priorities, the idols?
When your paycheck hits the bank, what are the first expenses that get paid?
Is it your grateful, willing, proportional offering of thanks to the Lord?
Or is it your 5 streaming subscriptions, sports association dues, traveling fund, etc.?
Or (since many people use automatic withdrawals and you don't have to be mindful of the timing),
are you mindful of the amount? Is it refigured periodically to reflect your priorities
or are you giving the same amount you began giving 20 years ago.

Now these questions are not meant to condemn you; nor are they meant to justify you.
They are just a few quick questions to help you examine your true priority,
because... What Christian family starts off saying, "You know, going to church every Sunday
is good... for a while, but after a few years, let's just go occasionally... when it's convenient"?
And after successfully making that transition, follows it up with, "You know,
just the major holidays and a few of the special occasions is enough for us really."
And all the while, they get busier and busier with their "other" priorities.

... Nobody says that... and I doubt that people even think that...
But after being a pastor for a few years, this is the pattern that I have seen, that Judges warns us of.

You know, during the time of the judges, the Israelites still would have considered themselves to be believers in Yahweh... they just also worshipped the Baals and Ashtaroths... "other priorities." They thought they could believe in Yahweh AND also be polytheists (believing in many gods), but this is an impossible dichotomy.

Jesus even touched on this topic in His Sermon on the Mount: **No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.**

You cannot serve God and money Matthew 6:24 & work & family & sports & entertainment...
All "other priorities" are idols... other, false gods.

...
But what's the solution to all of this? What if you see "other priorities" taking precedence in your life? Is it as simple as, "just go to church and Sunday school"? Or "send your child to PLS" and all your "other priorities" will go away?

No! In fact, in a way it's even simpler... Repent!

Not "repent" and keep doing what you're doing (that would leave you in the same position). But repent and receive forgiveness and amend your "other priorities" to reflect your only true Priority. You have a God, just as the Israelites did, who has pity on you and has raised up His Son to save you. Where your "other priorities" have begun to choke out your time and offering and devotion to God, Jesus' holy blood, more precious than gold and Netflix and Seahawks and little league and Cancun, has atoned for your idolatry and has washed your heart to make it clean again. The Lord has saved you from your "other priorities" and forgives you.

...
Now if the problem with the Israelites was that they **did not know the Lord or the work He had done**, then the solution is to **know the Lord and the work that He has done**.

For Israel, God's saving acts through the Passover, through the Red Sea, through Moses, Joshua, & the judges were types and figures of the true salvation to come in Jesus Christ. But you have the full revelation!

You have the accounts of Jesus' perfect life, lived for you as your substitute, so that you can live in freedom from the burden of the law and in gratefulness to God. You have the accounts of Jesus' suffering and crucifixion and death for you, to atone for your sins so that you can be free from the burden of a guilty conscience and free from shame. You have the accounts of Jesus' resurrection from the dead that gives new life and invigorates you so that you can demote at your "other priorities" to what they really are: "blessings from your Lord."

If you know and believe these things because they are your life and salvation, then those around you (especially your children if the Lord has so blessed you) need to know them too, because they are their life and salvation, too.

If you appreciate your sins forgiven through Jesus, then so will your kids and neighbors and coworkers. When they know that hearing God's Word and being in God's gracious presence is the highest priority for you, because they see you go eagerly AND joyfully, not because you "have to" but because you NEED to and WANT to, they will take note.

When they see you reading the Scriptures at home

and hear you talking about your Savior (and theirs) regularly
during home devotions and prayers, and even on the road or when you're relaxing,
they will be convinced you actually believe it.

And then pray for them... even/especially if they are not currently following suit.
Pray that the Lord would have pity on them and continue to extend His grace to them
that they would also be convinced, believe, and be saved.

The Lord promises that **the prayer of a righteous person** (a believer) is **powerful and effective**. James 5:16
In my few years as a pastor, I have seen these prayers answered in ways that even exceed our requests,
even years after the prayers were first begun... even after the one who prayed them had died.

Know the Lord, that He is the one and only true God, and He has pity on you
and has done a great work for you for He has raised up our Savior for you,
to give you new life... with only one Priority.

Christ is Risen... **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria