

Getting Back Into The Fight!

All of us have experienced the devastating results of disobedience to God, personal setbacks, broken relationships, ruined reputations, and bad decisions. What should we do when our own sin and mistakes have defeated us? How should we respond when we have been humiliated by our own mistakes, when our own doings have undone us? Does God bench us for the season? Does he put us on the injured and reserved list indefinitely? Should we move to another state and make a fresh start? Is life as we knew it over?

Let's take a look at Joshua chapters 6 & 7. If you don't remember the story, please stop for a moment and go and read it. Here we have seen terrible defeat suffered by Israel as a result of Achan's sin. The sin of one man defeated the entire nation. Stopping the conquest of the promised land dead in its tracks. Following this set back, Israel accepted corporate responsibility and made corporate repentance and cleansing. After a gut-wrenching process, Achan made a full confession of his sin, and he and all of his family and their possessions were judged quickly and decisively. After they were all destroyed, a memorial was even built to remind the nation of the consequences of failing to obey God. The way God directed the leaders of Israel to deal with the sin in their camp was very different from how the politicians today have been dealing with our current moral problems! For Israel, there were no spin-doctors, no cover-ups, no denials, no drawn-out court battles, and no talk shows. The nation responded with honesty, truth and unity. And the most powerful man in the world, Joshua, humbled himself before God.

But that did not bring an end to this story. What about Ai, the scene of Israel's defeat? Would they be able to move past this huge defeat in their mission to take the land? Following confession, repentance and cleansing, remarkably, Israel is commanded by God to get back into the fight – immediately. God put Israel's sin behind Him! He spoke to Joshua:

“Now the Lord said to Joshua: ‘Do not be afraid, not be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it.’” Joshua 8:1-2

Once again, God is encouraging Joshua. No mention is made of the sins and defeats of the past! The past is done with, as far as God is concerned. But this time, the rules of holy war would be followed scrupulously! Previously, Joshua did not get God's word before his attempt to take Ai. Now, he hears God's commands, and he will obey following the details exactly. This time the whole army is sent out. Normally, when a reduced army is employed, it is so that Israel would be sure to trust in God, not her military might. In the first attack on Ai, the reduced number represented false confidence; in this instance the whole army expresses faith by going up together.

The outcome of the battle is that the king of Ai was given into the hands of Israel. Victory is just as sure at the outset of the second attack, as defeat was certain at the start of the first. This demonstrates what can be accomplished when God's people act in accordance with His will.

In this battle, the Lord's Heren (Holy War), those things devoted to God for destruction, includes only the city and the people, not the livestock or the precious metal. At Jericho, total Heren, or destruction was God's command. But now Israel could share the plunder, not total

destruction as seen in Deuteronomy 2:34-35 and 3:6-7 where God commands everything to be destroyed.

Perhaps Jericho was a test to see if Israel would fully obey the Lord. In the coming battle, however, the temptation that caused Achan's down fall would be removed. Or, perhaps, in the first battle all of Jericho was to be given to the Lord, while in subsequent battles some of God's spoils would be given to His people. Also, we have to remember that the provisions of manna had ceased by this time and Israel was in need of food. Perhaps this means that in our battles we can receive spoils sometimes, but not all the time. We must always remember that everything belongs to the Conquering King.

The battle calls for a cunning ambush. There is no priestly procession here as was the case at Jericho. The miracle of the parting of the Red Sea was followed by the battle against the Amalekites where God entrusted the sword to Joshua. (Exodus chapter 17) There was no big miracle at Ai as there was at Jericho. It is the same in the history of the Church. At the time of the Apostles many miraculous things happened. But in the years since, miraculous occurrences are few and far between, and sometimes an exception, not the rule.

Notice God's word of encouragement to Joshua. The leader of Israel is fearful, having suffered humiliating defeat. He even questioned God as to whether He is on the right track. However, God tells Joshua to not fear or to be dismayed. This is also what God told him in Joshua chapter 1.

The command by God to "not fear" is repeated continually to Moses, to Joshua, and to the church. The word to "be not dismayed" is descriptive of leaders whose courage has been shattered. It speaks of accomplishing a great task that has been commanded by God.

Defeat makes us fearful. We get discouraged when we succumb to sin, or make mistakes or bad decisions. We become paralyzed and lose hope. Our enemies seem more entrenched and more formidable. We become afraid to get back into the fight. No matter how many victories we have had in the past, or how many acts of God we have witnessed, just one defeat causes us to lose the will to fight. Joshua had walked with God for many years and he had seen God do amazing things. Yet, even Joshua needed this word from the Lord. Joshua was human. Just like us. We are fearful people. We are afraid of conflict, war, an uncertain future, illness, and most of all death. This fear takes away our freedom and gives our society the power to manipulate us with threats and promises.

At times our fear can be more debilitating than the enemy himself. The fact is that the only way we can be prevented from taking possession of the land is by our own fear, unbelief, and lack of courage. The only way the enemy can gain the upper hand is if we remain paralyzed by our own fear.

However, God knows when we need a word from Him. When we face defeat, He is ready with a word of encouragement that promises His presence with us. He wants us to simply start obeying Him again. We don't need to mope, regret or question. When we have confessed and purified our hearts, then it is the time to get back on our feet and continue the struggle. **No failure has to be final.** God is a faithful lover to each one of us. He is always quick to tell us the same thing He said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, I am with you."

Perhaps this is the words you need to hear. Are you suffering defeat? Do you feel the enemy is smothering you? Have you given up hope? Then God is saying to you, "Do not fear. Do not be dismayed, I am with you." Listen to the book of Deuteronomy:

"When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, 'Hear O Israel: today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be

terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies to save you.” Deut. 20:1-4

As we read the book of Joshua, we can learn how to war and win today. So what can the Church learn from this ancient battle of Ai?

That a life of triumph can be ours when we once again turn from the evil of this world, turn from our mistakes, and we start to walk in obedience and trust once again. Just because we have been defeated by the enemy like Joshua was at Ai, it doesn't mean we cannot have a victory tomorrow. Just as we learned with Achan, Ai, and Joshua, we serve a God of Victory!

God brings us into the land, into our life in Christ as a gift. But there are enemies inhabiting the land, and God commands us to put to death these enemies of sin and evil -- to sever our dependence on the world and place our trust in Him. He wants us to use our mortal bodies as instruments of righteousness, and He promises to be with us in battle. He promises that some day we will be completely free from these things, and in that day we will shed the shame and the guilt of the past and the need for anybody or anything other than God.

However God knows we will fail. But even then He reaches out to us. He promises to be with us, and God encourages us to get back in the fight. Our failures does not change His opinion of us. or His love for us, or His plan for us. He still wants us to be glorified with His Son. Victory will come if we (the Church will turn from our division and competition with each other) turn from our sin and start obeying God. This is the conclusion to the Achan story. If we don't move from Joshua chapter 7 to Joshua chapter 8 we will lose the whole point, and the battle. God is a God of redemption, a God of infinite chances who is committed to making us His Holy possession.

Victory only comes as our hearts are transformed, as we walk in the Spirit, becoming more Godly men and women. Sometimes this can only happen through unpleasant circumstances. We have to die to ourselves. We may not get married. We may never get that job promotion, and our children's behavior may still cause us pain. Victory means that no matter the circumstances we can experience peace, rest, and freedom. As God gives us the power to say "no" to our sinful desires, and what seems like failures. Victory means that when we confront an ethical delimma at work, we don't have to be fearful. Victory means that when we share the gospel, we can do so boldly and confidently because God is with us. Victory means that whether we are single or married we can be content. Victory means that we are becoming more and more like Christ, going deeper and deeper into the heart of our Savior.

The key to all this is a willingness to obey God. This is what was critical to the victory at Ai – Joshua's willingness to count the cost, to be courageous, to stretch out his hand and to follow God. What if Joshua would have had a pity party, Saying "I'm no good, I'll never amount to anything, sin had got the better of me"? But no, Joshua went back into battle. He obeyed God, and trusted in God's promises. That is what we must do also. We are called to get up, brush ourselves off, confess our problems or sins, and follow our Lord. And we must do the same thing tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. Because Jesus loves us, we are His people, and He will lead us into triumph. No matter how bad we have been defeated, we are only one moment from entering into victory again.

Many times I hear a comment on the ruthlessness of God in commanding Israel to destroy the nations living in the promised land. The Israelites were instructed to completely kill these people and, in the case of Jericho and Ai, to burn the cities completely to the ground. What we have to remember is that God had been waiting 400 years to judge these tribes. God told Abraham in Genesis 15 that Israel would be strangers in a land that wasn't theirs, where they would be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years. But then He promised to bring them out of the land of Egypt and back to Canaan. ". . . then in the 4th generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." (Gen 15:16)

God had been very patient with the tribes of Canaan. But now their iniquity was complete. Their practices were an abomination – child sacrifice and sexual immorality were just two of

the terrible sins they engaged in. Every man, woman and child worshipped and served demon spirits. The cup of God's wrath was full, and Israel was God's chosen instrument of judgment. Every thing in the land was under a curse, devoted to God for destruction. God is patient, but His judgment against sin and iniquity is certain. Over the centuries many nations have faced the judgment of God. No nation is exempt, not even the United States. There will come a day when the whole world will face a terrible judgment.

God's holy character requires Him to be a God of judgment, but He is also the God of Salvation. The King of Ai was hanged on a tree. This man was under a curse and he faced the wrath of an angry God. We too, were under the same curse when we were headed for the judgment day. But God provided for us a way of salvation. He sent His Son Jesus, the King of Israel, into the very same judgment that was shared by the king of Ai. Jesus redeemed us by becoming a curse for us. (Gal 3:13) He too was hanged on a tree, a sacrifice to satisfy God. So the sacrifice of Jesus became an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (Eph. 5:22) Jesus became a Canaanite king for us. He endured an excruciating, humiliating death that we might receive salvation. The wrath which God poured out on the king of Ai, was poured out on His very own Son.

There is a way to deal with our sins, the sins of the United States with her abortions, monosexuality, incest and much more. The shame that we have become, the defeat that is happening, and our failure as a Church. It is through Jesus!

We may fall into sin, and defeat because of it. If we do not repent and correct our way quickly, God may even chastise us. God's chastisement may be very painful, and very severe. Hebrews chapter 12 likens it to "scourging" at times. But God encourages us even in the midst of this painful event in our life. He says:

"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." Hebrews 12:11-13

Dear brothers and sisters, you have heard and read our teaching about God's courtroom. When Satan is warring against us, we can take our case into the courtroom of the final absolute and supreme Judge of the universe! BUT, because we are fallible human beings, sometimes we fall and sin, or make mistakes and do wrong things. When this is the case, Satan has the legal right to defeat us. He is just waiting for us to do something like this. When we do, he goes flying before the Lord, petitioning to destroy us. We are sure Satan did this immediately after the battle with Jericho. He petitioned God to defeat Israel in their next battle because of Achan's sin. Because God is a just judge, He had to grant Satan's petition. The same thing happens in our own lives when we fall. Satan is just waiting for us to sin or make a mistake or a wrong decision. Then he grabs the situation and blows it all out of proportion and makes a huge crisis out of it.

We had just such a situation happen to us some years ago. We traveled into Canada to minister. We had been up almost 48 hours by the time we arrived at our destination in the wee hours of the morning. We were so exhausted that we forgot to do something we should have done. We did not mean to do wrong, we were simply overtired and forgot. A human error. But, Satan grabbed onto the situation and blew it up into a huge crisis. Normally, nothing would have happened as a result of our forgetting, but Satan was swiftly moving to destroy us because of it. I knew the whole situation was of Satan's making, but I could not effectively command him off of it because we had given him the legal right to attack us. I could not go into God's courtroom and ask Him to judge between us and Satan, because in this case God would have to render judgment in Satan's favor! I didn't know what to do, so I asked the Lord to show me how to pray. As I wept before the Lord over the situation, suddenly He answered me so clearly. "I have more than one throne, you know." And the following scripture flooded into my mind:

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.” Hebrews 4:15-16

Let me tell you, I went flying before that throne of grace yelling “Mercy!, Help!” the whole way! God heard my plea, and answered me. Within the next hour, the whole situation simply dissolved and disappeared! Let us never forget that we serve a God who is a completely just Judge, but we also serve a God who is a God of mercy and grace as well.

The New Testament says that neither sin nor Satan will have dominion over us. The shame of defeat need not be carried in our hearts. God has covered it all. He has poured out His stored-up wrath for our sin upon His beloved Son. All of us were under a curse, and devoted to destruction. But Jesus took our place. Now God’s promise to us is that He will never leave us or forsake us. So He bids us to arise and not to fear. He calls us to obey, to walk in the power of His Spirit, and to experience the life of Christ in the land. As it was for Israel and for Joshua, may our own personal battles result in God-given victories, and not defeat. Have you been defeated? Then get up, dust yourself off, “. . . strengthen the hands which hang down and the feeble knees . . .” (Hebrews 12:12). Repent, confess your sins and mistakes to God, cleanse your life, and then get back into the fight!

A Praise Report

As you know we have been working on a building for a convention center for the past two years. We are happy to report that the outside of the building is now finished. Praise the Lord! Here are some pictures of it, both outside and inside. Our next project is heating and air-conditioning for the building. This will cost us roughly \$20,000. When the building is finished, it will seat 500 – 800 people. Our vision is to be able to hold camp meetings there so that people can come to receive intensive teaching on spiritual warfare. Obviously, we cannot accomplish such a project on our own. We ask you to pray that God will open the hearts of those who can help us with this project.

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