

02-11-18 – Ai Defeated

Joshua 8

At a certain children's hospital, a boy gained a reputation for wreaking havoc with the nurses and staff. One day a visitor who knew about his terrorizing nature made him a deal; "If you are good for a week," she said, "I'll give you a dime when I come again." A week later she stood before his bed. "I'll tell you what," she said, "I won't ask the nurses if you behaved. You must tell me yourself. Do you deserve the dime?" After a moment's pause, a small voice from among the sheets said: "Gimme a penny." (Lewis and Faye Copeland, 10,000 Jokes, Toasts, and Stories)

Let's review where we are so far in our story. Israel passed over the Jordan on dry land to the west side. They camped at Gilgal and faced Jericho as their first battle. They ate of the First Fruits of the new land and celebrated the Passover there. At this point God stopped providing manna, since they would have abundance in this land flowing with milk and honey.

We mentioned that the years before crossing the Jordan can represent a carnal sinful life, but crossing the Jordan represents the dedicated Christian life. This is a new spiritual life lived for God and receiving His blessings of the Promised Land.

Before their first battle, God met with Joshua and gave him specific plans for the victory. They obeyed God's plan and won effortlessly against this huge fortified city. The Ark was there (God's presence), the trumpets blew, and the people shouted. The walls fell flat except for the part where Rahab's home was. It was a symbol of God's justice and mercy at the same time.

Everything was wonderful. God was with them; they were victorious; the city was destroyed. There was only one problem – Disobedience! Achan took some plunder from Jericho after God order it not to be touched, but to be dedicated to Him (First Fruits of the battle). He hid it in his tent and tried to cover it up.

Next the Israelites decided to conquer Ai, a small city, but strategic. They attacked and were defeated and 36 men were killed in the battle as they fled. What happened? God exposed Achan, and he confessed. His entire family was stoned to death because of his sin. The nation suffered because of his sin. The battle was lost because of his sin. Can you relate at all to any of this? God's wrath calmed down and Israel began to be victorious again.

"There were three reasons for defeat at Ai: self-confidence, prayerlessness, and disobedience. Can it be that some Christian who has entered into a new experience of God and claimed by faith the victory of Christ has been disillusioned and defeated? And can it be that the reason for this is that he has been confident in himself, has not prayed, or has been disobedient to God?"

- Alan Redpath

Mark Twain encountered a ruthless businessman from Boston during his travels who boasted that nobody ever got in his way once he determined to do something. He said, "Before I die I mean to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I'm gonna climb Mount Sinai. And when I'm up there, I'm gonna read the Ten Commandments aloud at the top of my voice!" Unimpressed, Twain responded, "I got a better idea. Stay in Boston and keep 'em."
(The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes)

As Achan met and caused defeat, God's people, who are disobedient, also meet defeat. Now Israel had to go back and conquer Ai, but it would not be easy. Our text today is about this second battle against Ai and how different it was.

<Prayer>

Josh. 8:1-2 (MSG) - God said to Joshua, "Don't be timid and don't so much as hesitate. Take all your soldiers with you and go back to Ai. I have turned the king of Ai over to you—his people, his city, and his land.

"Do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king. Only this time you may plunder its stuff and cattle to your heart's content. Set an ambush behind the city."

Did you notice the difference right from the start? God said to Joshua. There was dialogue with God – Prayer happened this time first, just like before Jericho. God said, "Josh, let me tell you how this is going to go down. First know this, I am giving you the city, you will win, you will conquer the city, the king, the people, the land, and all their stuff." It will be just like Jericho, however, this time you can take the plunder and keep it for the people. I got my First Fruits from Jericho, now the rest of the battles are for you and My people. God demands the First Fruits, but then He blesses us back with everything else. We can't lose if we obey.

Then God lays out the battle plan that Joshua must follow. Take ALL your soldiers and go back to Ai for a battle. Set an ambush behind the city. Last time in their arrogance, they only took 3000 men; this time they will take 30,000 men – 10 times the force would be needed this time. God would give them victory, but they would have to work for it. Even though God has won the victory over Satan and sin, sin can still defeat us. *"Then we must rid ourselves of that sin, hard as it may be, and through Christ gain victory over it."* (p. 56). It's much harder the second time. When we lose a spiritual battle, it greatly weakens us spiritually. It takes everything to win.

"The story of Ai is symbolic of fleshly sin – its subtlety, its seeming insignificance. We think we can control our tempers and our lusts and our evil thoughts if we simply decide to. But we discover it isn't that easy – and failure to conquer the lusts of the flesh can produce tragic, disastrous defeat." (Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, p. 119)

Josh. 8:3-8 (MSG) - *Joshua and all his soldiers got ready to march on Ai. Joshua chose thirty thousand men, tough, seasoned fighters, and sent them off at night with these orders: “Look sharp now. Lie in ambush behind the city. Get as close as you can. Stay alert. I and the troops with me will approach the city head-on. When they come out to meet us just as before, we’ll turn and run. They’ll come after us, leaving the city. As we are off and running, they’ll say, ‘They’re running away just like the first time.’ That’s your signal to spring from your ambush and take the city. God, your God, will hand it to you on a platter. Once you have the city, burn it down. God says it, you do it. Go to it. I’ve given you your orders.”*

The strategy was to ambush the city from behind. They executed the plan and God brought the victory. Most of the army lay in ambush while a small group attacked Ai from the front. Then they ran as before, and Ai advanced after them as before. When they lured Ai out into the wilderness after them, the army of Israel attacked the city from behind and totally destroyed it. They set everything on fire. Then the army of Ai looked back and saw the smoke and realized they had been tricked. Too late. All 12,000 people of Ai were destroyed by the sword. Israel then slaughtered and destroyed all and everything in the city. The plunder they kept for themselves.

Josh. 8:23-29 (MSG) - *Then the men in the ambush poured out of the city. The men of Ai were caught in the middle with Israelites on both sides—a real massacre. And not a single survivor. Except for the king of Ai; they took him alive and brought him to Joshua. When it was all over, Israel had killed everyone in Ai, whether in the fields or in the wilderness where they had chased them. When the killing was complete, the Israelites returned to Ai and completed the devastation. The death toll that day came to twelve thousand men and women—everyone in Ai. Joshua didn’t lower his outstretched javelin until the sacred destruction of Ai and all its people was completed. Israel did get to take the livestock and loot left in the city; God’s instructions to Joshua allowed for that. Joshua burned Ai to the ground. A “heap” of nothing forever, a “no-place”—go see for yourself. He hanged the king of Ai from a tree. At evening, with the sun going down, Joshua ordered the corpse cut down. They dumped it at the entrance to the city and piled it high with stones—you can go see that also.*

“The taking of both cities is instructive. Jericho was taken supernaturally, while Ai was taken strategically. The Christian life contains both: the supernatural and the strategic. There are times when God brings victory in a miraculous way, but there are also times when he brings victory in a mundane way. We should anticipate both possibilities. We should pray and we should plan, for we never know whether victory will take place through divine intervention or human preparation.” - Eugene Peterson – (The Message Study Bible, p.321)

Israel was commanded to destroy everything in Ai, and they did. They now had complete victory over Ai. When we lose a spiritual battle, no matter how small, it takes more effort to gain victory the next time, but it is possible with God. This teaches us to stay close to God and obey His word.

“Israel lost their first battle with Ai – because Achan stole God’s “First Fruits” in Jericho. The Lord knew it was important for His people to know His Law – “Thou shalt not steal,” lie, etc. After their victory, Israel did what God directed in Deuteronomy 27... They went to two mountains about 20 miles north of Ai – Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim.

I will summarize this part of our chapter and not read it to save time...

The two peaks were about 1 ½ miles apart and the base of the mountains almost touched each other in the valley. Shechem was centered in the valley between them. It was an amphitheater effect so that a human voice could be heard at both summits. There Joshua gathered the people of Israel. The priests with the Ark of God were in the center of the valley. The 12 tribes were split with 6 tribes on each side of the Ark, facing each other. There Joshua built an altar of natural stones not carved by tools. It was here that Abraham built his first altar to God some 600 years earlier. Joshua offered sacrifices to God on this altar. Then he wrote the Law of Moses on the stones in the presence of all Israel while they watched.

It was also here that Jacob dug his famous well, and here that Jesus in the N.T. spoke about the water of eternal life. Joshua then read the Law of Moses to the people – the blessings and the curses. He read every word of the Law of God. The tribes against Mt. Ebal responded to the curses – Thou shall be cursed ... the judgment and curse that follows not obeying God’s laws. The tribes against Mt. Gerizim responded to the blessings – Thou shall be blessed ... the blessings, joy, and glory that comes to those who obey God.

Everyone heard the blessings and cursing of the Lord that day – Israelites and strangers alike. “God wanted ALL to hear His Law, for it gives people conscience against lying, stealing, adultery, murder, etc. It would cause everyone to desire the blessings of obeying God.” (p. 59).

God commanded they (Israel) repeat this procedure every 7 years at the Feast of Tabernacles so all future generations would hear the Word of God and choose to obey.

N.T. - Jesus gave the test of our love to God – ***“If you love me, keep my commandments.”***
Jn 14:15.

To this day, we need to know God's Law and the results of keeping or not keeping His commandments. The defeat at Ai showed the consequences of not keeping God's commands. When they turned and obeyed, they realized a great victory that put them back on track with God.

"As N.T. believers, if we do not obey the Lord, we will end up living like unsaved people, and God may have to judge us. Those who choose not to obey God, in time, always suffer the consequences." (p. 60).

Today we are very fortunate here in the U.S. to have the Word of God readily available to us. We can buy a Bible any day and anywhere and have it in our possession. We do not realize what a privilege that is. And yet, how many read and study the Bible that we have so easily acquired? Are you in the Word on a regular basis, or is it just a book to take back and forth to church each Sunday – some don't even do that, since we post the text on the screen anyway. Maybe that's not such a good thing. Just saying.

Corinne and I grew up in the faith attending services before there were projectors and PowerPoint. We learned to follow along in our Bibles from text to text, passage to passage, reference to reference, taking notes and marking up our Bibles during the sermon. It was a good thing, IMHO. We've gotten soft with technology. You don't even have to bring a Bible to church any more.

"To experience personal victory in our lives and to enjoy God's blessings, we need to regularly read His word and hear His word at church. The greatest respect we give God – is our obedience to His word." (p. 61).