



### 19. Joshua Chapter 8 – The God of ~~Second Chances~~ More chances than you can count!

On Wednesday we talked about a big mistake that Israel had made. After they had taken Jericho, they proceeded to take the City of Ai. Before going into Jericho, God had said that anything taken in the conquest of Jericho was to be set aside for Him. But as we learned on Wednesday night, a man named Achan had taken things of value and he had hidden them in a hole in his tent. The lesson we learned on

Wednesday from Joshua 7 is that sin has far reaching consequences that we don't always realize. We all sin, but unlike Achan we should strive to understand what we've done, to repent of what we've done, and to make a fresh start in our walk with the Lord. Wonderfully for every believer, we have the promise of 1 John 1:9 that gives us a way to acknowledge before God that what we've thought, said, or done is contrary to His will and this restores sweet fellowship with Him.

Once Achan was dealt with, that hindrance in fellowship was removed. Achan wasn't the only one who had made a mistake. Joshua made some mistakes too. Joshua didn't consult the Lord at all as he had done before attacking Jericho. And, his commanders had been prideful in thinking that they "had this one on their own". We are so in trouble when we feel so self-sufficient that we think we can do things without God. We learn from scripture over and over how important it is to rely on the Lord.

*8 The LORD said to Joshua, "Take all the soldiers with you and go on up to Ai. Don't be afraid or discouraged. I will give you victory over the king of Ai; his people, city, and land will be yours."*

Joshua needed a second chance, and God gave it to him. We all make mistakes and make wrong turns.

Sin has such an impact that we can be so afraid of what happened in our past that we fear to move forward tomorrow. We end up being paralyzed, but in the midst of that God says, "Don't be afraid or discouraged." I am sure that Joshua was fearful of another disaster at Ai, but God is telling him, "Joshua, don't be afraid. I have this one since you've given it to me."

It is one thing to hear the Word of God, but it is a different thing to hear the Word of God and to do it. We need to have our ear as close to the heart of God as we can. This means reading the word. This means praying. This means listening. Then obeying what we know to be his will. .

I make mistakes and you make mistakes, but we have to believe Him that He forgives us and we move on. I think two of the biggest problem areas we have as believers are taking offense at what others in the church say or do, and probably secondly, is knowing how to receive forgiveness and extend forgiveness. In this verse, God is encouraging Joshua to once again walk by faith and not by sight. Joshua's EXPERIENCE was different than victory in his first attempt to take the City of Ai. But, he was willing to put that experience behind and move forward once again in belief. This reminds me how VERY dangerous it is to base our spiritual lives on experience. Relying on feelings and experience can get us into trouble. The fact of the matter is that my experiences and your experiences can get in the way of understanding God's truth for our lives. Let's move on to verse two.

*<sup>2</sup> You are to do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king, but this time you may keep its goods and livestock for yourselves. Prepare to attack the city by surprise from the rear."*

God doesn't only give Joshua the city and the king, but this time He also gives him the reward (the physical spoils). God says that He's going to give them both the city and the spoils from the city. If Achan had just waited a couple of days he could have had whatever he wanted from Ai, but his greed got in the way. Then in the next few verses, God gave Joshua a strategic plan on how to take the City of Ai.

*<sup>3</sup> So Joshua got ready to go to Ai with all his soldiers. He picked out thirty thousand of his best troops and sent them out at night*

God is getting ready to give him orders that were totally different than what had happened in Jericho. Remember what I said last week? God always seems to surprise with the unexpected instead of the expected. God had a plan that defied all human understanding in taking down the walls of Jericho, and now the plan was to ambush the enemy from behind. This reminds us not to try to out think God. He solves problems in our lives in ways we can't even imagine, and it is often in ways we've never seen before.

*<sup>4</sup> with these orders: "Hide on the other side of the city, but not too far away from it; be ready to attack. <sup>5</sup> My men and I will approach the city. When the men of Ai come out against us, we will turn and run, just as we did the first time. <sup>6</sup> They will pursue us until we have led them away from the city. They will think that we are running from them, as*

*we did before. <sup>7</sup> Then you will come out of hiding and capture the city. The LORD your God will give it to you. <sup>8</sup> After you have taken the city, set it on fire, just as the LORD has commanded. These are your orders.” <sup>9</sup> So Joshua sent them out, and they went to their hiding place and waited there, west of Ai, between Ai and Bethel. Joshua spent the night in camp.*

You remember the reason Israel got beat the first time they went into Ai? It was their self confidence. And now, God is going to use the self-confidence of the people of Ai to bring about their downfall. God had the people of Israel come up to the front and the plan was to pretend to run off in fear. When they ran, the men of Ai would go running after them, and this left a place for the armies of Israel to come in behind them to trap them.

*<sup>9</sup> Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people. <sup>10</sup> Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. <sup>11</sup> And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai. <sup>12</sup> So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of [\[a\]](#) the city. <sup>13</sup> And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.*

*<sup>14</sup> Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. <sup>15</sup> And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. <sup>16</sup> So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. <sup>17</sup> There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city. <sup>19</sup> So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. <sup>20</sup> And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.*

*<sup>21</sup> Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. <sup>22</sup> Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. <sup>23</sup> But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.*

*<sup>24</sup> And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. <sup>25</sup> So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. <sup>26</sup> For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. <sup>27</sup> Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. <sup>28</sup> So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. <sup>29</sup> And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day.*

God brought about all of this so differently. We get into trouble when we try to pigeon hole God into doing things the way He might have done in the past. When I started at Union Grove, I told the seven folks or so remaining that things were going to change. I remember that I told them that the last seven words of a dying church were “We’ve never done it this way before.” I am not saying that we need to change things to just change them. But we need to be open to what God wants to do RIGHT NOW. We can get into real trouble in the church when we are unwilling to sing new songs or use new methods. The message is the same eternal message, but the methods change with the time. We get into trouble when we mistake methods with the message.

Sandy and I used to talk about a problem that we’ve seen in ministries. Ministries start up that never end even though they bear no fruit. Ministries have a season, and then they should be over with. We hang onto them because they’ve become institutions instead of ministries. People’s jobs are at stake. Things continue on because they were always done that way.

Another example of this is that I’ve had folks come to me and say that maybe we need an old time revival with a tent and sawdust on the floor. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, but we shouldn’t try to duplicate something just because it was the way God worked in the past. One of our people told me he didn’t like the term revival as a place where the lost get saved because you can only be revived if you were alive before. God

doesn't need a revival meeting to rekindle our hearts. He needs us to confess to Him today that change in our hearts is needed and we're ready to be changed!

Sandy and I used to go to Bible studies in homes when we first got married, and they were wonderful, but we moved on beyond that to other points of ministry that God had for us. One thing we love about Wednesday nights here at the Grove is that it sort of feels to us like it did back in those days. But, the bottom line is that we need to be listening to the Holy Spirit and His direction in this church.

In the last verses (30-35) of this chapter we see Joshua having the people stand between two mountains, Mount Gerazim and Mount Ebal. There between those mountains



Joshua renewed Israel's covenant with God. It's interesting because Moses had told the people that they were to do this when they passed over the Jordan. (Deut 11) He had told them that they were to read on Mt Gerazim the blessings that came from obeying the Lord. They were to read the cursings that came from disobedience on Ebal.

So here, in this place, all of Israel was shouting out the blessings and the cursings of the law. And they read the entire Torah (first five books of the Bible). Notice in verse 30 that there was an altar built on Mt Ebal. And there on Mt Ebal they made sacrifices on the mount of curses. Perhaps God was showing them that a blood sacrifice was required to be freed from the curse of the law. Under the Old Covenant, the blood sacrifice just "covered the sin", but under the New Covenant, the sins and disobedience were washed away. That my friends is grace.

*Galatians 3* <sup>10</sup> For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." <sup>11</sup> But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." <sup>12</sup> Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." <sup>13</sup> Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), <sup>14</sup> that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Friends, we are the gentiles who have received the promise of the Spirit by faith.

Let us pray.

