

Joshua 8:2-35 - Thursday, April 26th, 2012

(1) And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard *about it*, (2) that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

- One of the reasons I wanted to begin with verse one having only got through to verse one last week, is because of the powerful life lesson in it.
- Namely, the lesson that failure teaches us. Like with the Israelites learning from their failure at Ai, so too can we learn the importance of failure.
- I want to sort of pick it up where we left off last week with Peter's miserable failure, as it's germane to our understanding of Joshua chapter 8.

- In other words, just as Jesus restores Peter after he denied Him three times, so too does the Lord restore the Israelites after their failure in Ai.
- It's been said that God is the God of second chances, however, I would suggest that He's the God of endless chances and we see it with Peter.
- I believe that Peter thought God was through with him and it's evidenced by the fact that he goes back to his career as a professional fisherman.

One commentator said; "Peter and his friends tried all night to catch fish – and failed miserably. They had never had such a bad night in their entire lives. Once God has called you to be His, He won't let you go. He will make sure that you fail at fishing and at anything else you try! You can try as much as you like, but you will fail. God's love won't permit you to waste your life on trivialities. So, if you try to run away from Him, you will be a failure at everything you try wherever you go - until you come back to Him. ...Peter was turning away from the calling of God upon his life and God had to break him once again by making him fail. Those apostles had started fishing at about 6 o'clock in the evening. But Jesus didn't come to them until about 5 o'clock the next morning. The Lord knew that Peter was not going to get any fish that night. Why then didn't He come earlier - as soon as they went out - so that they wouldn't waste their time? Why didn't He come to them at least by 9 o'clock that night? Why did He wait till 5 o'clock the next morning? Why did He wait until they were exhausted, after having struggled for 11 hours and failed? In the answer to that question we discover God's design in allowing us to fail. There we see God's purpose in man's failure. There we will understand why He never came to help us in the past, when we were struggling, despite of our repeated cries for help, and why some of our earnest still remain unanswered. When Peter and his friends went out to fish that evening at 6 pm, ...they were brimming with hope. By 9 pm they hadn't caught any fish, and were perhaps a bit discouraged. But their outing could not still be written off as a "failure". By midnight they may have been quite depressed. By 4 am the next morning, they had begun to lose all hope. But they had still to become **total** failures. For that to happen, they had to fail some more. The graph of their self-confidence was going down. But it had to go all the way down to zero – to rock bottom. And that occurred only at 5 am. Then they were ready to give up. Then they must have said, "It's no use trying any more. Let's go home". That's when the Lord appeared. That is God's way. And the Lord filled their net to overflowing."

- God doesn't allow failure for the purpose of condemnation, rather it's for the purpose of restoration, and that's what's in store for Peter.

John 21:15-18 - 15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

- Why does Jesus ask Peter this three times? Because He is restoring Peter after he failed Jesus by denying Him three times.
- Another example of God's restoration instead of condemnation is in the parable of the prodigal son.

As one commentator wrote: "The story of the prodigal son, who wasted so many years, shows us that God gives His best in His restoration of failures. The father said, "Quickly bring out the best robe", for one who had let him down so badly. This is the message of the gospel - a new beginning, not just once, but again and again - because God never gives up on anyone. ...If there is a godly sorrow in your life for all your failures, then even if your sins are like scarlet or red like crimson, not only will your heart be made as white as snow - as promised under the old covenant (Isa. 1:18) - but God promises even more under the new covenant: "I will not remember your sins any more" (Heb. 8:12). Whatever your blunders or failures, you can make a new beginning with God. And even if you have made a thousand new beginnings in the past and have come to failure, you can still make the 1001st new beginning today. God can still make something glorious out of your life. While there is life, there is hope."

Yet I do not advise that we end the year on a somber note. The march, not the dirge, has ever been the music of Christianity. If we are good students in the school of life, there is much that the years have to teach us. But the Christian is more than a student, more than a philosopher. He is a believer, and the object of his faith makes the difference, the mighty difference. Of all persons the Christian should be best prepared for whatever the New Year brings. He has dealt with life at its source. In Christ he has disposed of a thousand enemies that other men must face alone and unprepared. He can face his tomorrow cheerful and unafraid because yesterday he turned his feet into the ways of peace and today he lives in God. The man who has made God his dwelling place will always have a safe habitation.

A.W. Tozer - *The Warfare of the Spirit*, p. 148

(2) 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."

- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is that had Achan not did what he did when he did it, he would had it now.
- There's a huge life lesson in this as it relates to the consequences of not waiting on the Lord, and impatiently taking matters into our own hands.
- Often times we thwart God and rob ourselves of the blessings of God all because we are unwilling to simply wait for him to act on our behalf.

Isaiah 64:4 NIV Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

Isaiah 30:18 NKJV Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD *is* a God of justice; Blessed *are* all those who wait for Him.

(3) So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. (4) And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. (5) Then I and all the people who *are* with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. (6) For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, '*They are* fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them. (7) Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. (8) And it will be, when you have taken the city, *that* you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you."

- There's something very fascinating woven into the fabric of these verses, and it's not so easy to see at first, but notice the contrast with Jericho.
- Here's what I'm thinking, the victory they are about to realize in Ai, is by any stretch of the imagination polar opposite of their victory in Jericho.
- I believe that this speaks to how God may choose to use an entirely different way of doing something in our lives than the way He did before.

Jon Courson in his commentary has a very insightful take on this; "Jericho was taken by day, Ai was to be taken at night. At Jericho, the Israelites were united. At Ai, they were divided into two companies. The battle of Jericho was a marvelous miracle. Ai was a military maneuver. At Jericho, the Israelites simply had to watch. At Ai, they were to work. ...We cannot box in what God desires to do in our lives concerning the battles that come to us. The Spirit-Filled life means I walk in the Spirit hour by hour, day by day, saying, 'Lord what do You want to do today?' rather than expecting Him to repeat that which He did yesterday."

(9) 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. (10) 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.

- Whenever you read verses like these, it's always good to ask yourself why it is the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary to include certain details.
- Here we're given this detail of Joshua spending the night among the people, then early the next morning Joshua is mustering up the people.
- What does the Lord want us to see here? I'm of the belief that this speaks to our greater than Joshua, Jesus being among us and leading us.

- On a practical level, it also teaches us a valuable lesson in leadership in that the best leaders are the ones who are there with and for people.
- On the other side of that table, you have the followers who need to know that their leader is with them as he both directs and protects them.
- I'm learning that sheep get spooked and scared easily, which is why it's of the utmost importance that they are able to feed in safe pastures.

(11) 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. (12) So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. (13) 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. (14) 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. (15) And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. (16) 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. (17) 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. (18) 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. (19) 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. (20) 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. (21) 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.

- Not only did the strategy of ambushing Ai work, the enemy's strategy of doing what worked the last time doesn't work. Actually it backfires.
- I think the lesson here is very clear, our battle is not against flesh and blood, and Satan will stay with what he knows worked the last time.
- I like how one Bible commentator so poignantly put it; "Generally, Satan will stick with a strategy against us until it doesn't work any more."

(22) 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. (23) But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. (24) 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. (25) So it was *that* all who fell that day, both men and women, *were* twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. (26) 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. (27) 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. (28) So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. (29) 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.

- You can't help but notice how it is that in the end Satan, like the king of Ai is doomed and cursed. He is a defeated foe, and one day we'll see it.
- He'll be defeated by our greater than Joshua on that great and final day, which I believe is very soon with all that's now happening prophetically.

(30) Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, (31) as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron *tool*." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. (32) And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. (33) Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them *were* in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. (34) And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. (35) There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

- It's important to note that they were obeying what God had commanded them to do back in the book of Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28.
- There's a "why" behind the "what" of this command to build an altar at this place, in this way, and it has to do with none other than God's Word.
- Notice how that they were to read it publicly before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the children, and even the foreigners with them.

- Why? It's because of the importance of God's Word at the family altar. How it impacts the lives of those we lead can never be understated.
- I've heard it said that when you think that you are too busy to read the Word of God, then you are likely too busy "not" to read the Word of God.
- I can't think of a better way to end what is arguably one of the most packed full chapters in this book of Joshua than on the "why" of our Bibles.
- More specifically how vital it is to never lose confidence in the Word of God especially in a day and age of an all out assault on the Word of God.