

Joshua 8:1 - Thursday, April 19th, 2012

(1) Now the LORD said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor 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.

- It's verses like this in God's Word that can be the source of much hope and encouragement in that God is both gracious and merciful to us.
- In other words, the God of endless chances gives the Israelites the victory over Ai after suffering a devastating defeat because of Achan's sin.
- If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the most powerful lessons we can learn in the Christian life, it would be the lessons from failure.

F.B. Meyer in his commentary on Joshua writes; "The experience of defeat is far too common to the majority of Christians. They are constantly turning their backs before their enemies. They are defeated by indwelling sin and the assaults of Satan, and by the mighty evils which they assail in the name of God. But instead of taking their defeats to heart, they become inured to them. For the time they are filled with mortification and chagrin, but the impression soon wears away. They do not lie on their faces before God, eager to discover the cause of failure, to deal with it, and to advance from the scene of defeat to wider and more permanent success. If we but carefully investigated the causes of our defeats, they would be only second to victories in their blessed results on our character and lives.

- What God does with failures and defeat of men and woman of God is one of the most astonishing and fascinating aspects of the Word of God.
- Namely, that God can actually fulfill His purpose in man's failure as evidenced throughout scripture in the examples we have recorded for us.
- Many of the men and women of God, who were mightily used by God, had some really serious problems, and made really serious mistakes.

- God's purpose was fulfilled in man's failures beginning back with Adam. It fulfilled God's purpose in sending the second Adam Jesus the Christ.
- Sprinkled throughout the pages of holy writ from front to finish is one account after another of how God is glorified and we're bettered by failure.
- It's not just that God does it; it's the way God does it. He fulfills His purpose, not just in spite of, but, because of man's failures and defeat.

Gospel for Asia founder K.P. Yohannan in his wonderful book; "When We Have Failed – What Next? God's Answers to our Failures" writes; "Why does God show us the failures of these great leaders? Could it be that He wants us to know that in spite of our fiascos, He can still make something glorious out of our lives? ... I consider Jacob's biography one of the most interesting of them all. Here is why: Numerous times throughout the Bible, God reminds His people that He is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:15). In fact, in this same verse, God says, "This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation." Toward the end of his journey God changed Jacob's name, which means "deceiver," to Israel meaning "Prince of God." So, why doesn't He say, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and ... Israel"? How strange! How come He associates His name with a cheat who wasted two decades trying to do things his own way? Through His name, His very identity, God wants to say to you and me, "I am still the God who makes failures into Princes of God. I remain the God who takes broken lives – people with multiple divorces, sick in body because of sin, in prison for decades, labeled as losers, crazy folk nobody wants, outcasts with no hope --- and turns them into something beautiful."

- This of course presupposes that I'm willing to learn from those failures in my life. To be teachable is a prerequisite for one to learn from failure.
- As a matter of fact, the very reason God may allow failure and defeat into our lives in the first place is so that He can teach us to be teachable.
- He needs to teach us to be humble before Him, dependent on Him, and glorifying to Him, and He uses the instrument of failure to accomplish it.

- It's when we fail that a much-needed humility will come into our lives, which in turn brings us to that much-needed trust of God for our lives.
- Perhaps one of the best examples of this is when Jesus tells Peter that He is praying for him specifically that his "faith may not fail." (Luke 22:31-34)

Luke 22:31-34 NIV "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. (32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (33) But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." (34) Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

- It's interesting to note how Jesus doesn't pray that Peter won't fail, but that Peter's "faith" won't fail. He knew Peter's courage was going to fail.
- The reason it's important to know this is because courage was Peter's area of greatest strength, which is why the Lord had to allow the failure.
- Like God allowing the defeat in Ai because they in pride relied on their own strength, so too did God allow defeat for Peter for the same reason.

- I suppose you could say that Satan received permission to sift Peter only because it would ultimately serve God's purpose for Peter in the end.
- The bottom line is that the Devil is God's Devil, and in the process of sifting Peter, God is actually purifying, cleansing and humbling him.
- Those sifting blows and humbling wounds of failure are the catalyst for God granting, in His grace, that glorious victory and success in our lives.

Proverbs 20:30 NIV Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.

- Sometimes God, as a last resort, may have to give Satan permission to beat us up, and take us down, by sifting the pride out of our lives.
- God uses sifting to purge and remove the chaff of pride from the wheat of our Christian lives, and at the end of the day, we are bettered by it.
- If the truth be known, it's only the blow of my failure that cleanses away my pride, my reputation, my self-confidence, and my self-righteousness.

Stanley Voke in his powerful book "Personal Revival" says; "Bondage to reputation can be sheer slavery, and yet did we but know, it is only a form of struggle for our own righteousness. We are unwilling to be known as failures along any line. The trouble with success is that we dare not be failures, for if we are to keep our reputation we cannot admit ignorance or sin. That would be to collapse the sand castle before the tide had even come in. It is better to struggle on even to the breaking point than admit some need that would mean others knowing us as we really are."

Stanley Voke, Personal Revival pp 44-45

Another commentator said it this way; "It is only broken men and women whom God can use. And one way He breaks us is through repeated failures. One of the biggest problems that God has with us is to bless us in such a way that the blessing does not puff us up with pride. To get victory over anger and then to be proud of it, is to fall into a far deeper pit than the one we were in! God has to keep us humble in victory. Genuine victory over sin is always accompanied by the deepest humility. This is where repeated failures have a part to play in destroying our self-confidence so that we are convinced that victory over sin is not possible apart from God's enabling grace. Then, when we do get victory, we can never boast about it."

- There seems to be this common denominator in the scriptures with the men of God that repeatedly failed God. They humbly confessed.
- Moses did after 40 years, Elijah in the cave, David to Nathan, and like Peter they all "turned back," humbled themselves and repented.

- Moses murders an Egyptian and fails God miserably then spends 40 years on the backside of the desert in order to humble him.
- Elijah is so discouraged by his failure, he wants to die, then, God has to humble him by telling him that it's not all about him.
- David fails and falls sexually and murders the husband of the women that he commits adultery with, and covers it up until he's humbled.

- God knows that our sin always looks so much worse on somebody else, so He will show us ourselves using somebody else.
- God will show David his wretched sin by having the prophet Nathan tell him of another man's transgression.
- God will show Jacob his wretched sin by having his father in law Laban out con him while he works for him all those years.

- I'm learning that the best thing we can ever do as Christians is to be quick in admitting our failures as husbands, wives, and even parents.
- If we tarry to do it, the struggle on even to the breaking point will be too much to bear and you'll ultimately have to humbly break under it.
- Amazingly, the unspeakable freedom and victory that ensues will leave you wishing you'd have humbled yourself and repented sooner.

If you are still mourning and blaming yourself it is not because God is blaming you; He has put the blame on Jesus. It can only be due to one of two things. Either that you have not really repented, or, more likely, you are mourning over your lost righteousness. Perhaps you feel that, having been saved for so long, you should not be failing as you are... You are in effect saying, "Alas for my lost righteousness." That is nothing but pride.

Roy Hession, When I Saw Him, "Where Revival Begins." p63

- When we fail, it brings about a much-needed dependence upon the Lord. Failure shows us our weakness and our need for His strength.
- Perhaps one of the best examples of this is when God tells King Asa that he will fail because he didn't depend on the Lord.
- What makes his story so tragic is that he was one of Judah's best Kings and one of only nine who were pleasing in the Lord's site.

- God gave him success years earlier when he was dependant on the Lord for victory over the Ethiopian army against impossible odds.
- The failure came when he allied with and relied on Ben-hadad, the king of Aram by getting him to sever his alliance with King Baasha.
- By doing this, he was actually able to defeat the rival army of the northern kingdom, but the problem is that he didn't rely on the Lord.

2 Chronicles 16:7-9 7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. 8 Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." NIV

- When I'm strong, then I'm independent. Failure sort of forces me to both rely on and depend on the Lord to be strong on my behalf.
- Sometimes God will allow us to be brought to that place of utter failure because we're relying on our own strength and our own savvy.

- I believe that God; either, has, is, or will again and again, bring us to utter failure in and of our self so as to ruin us for Himself.
- God's purpose in man's failure is to bring us to the point where we realize three absolute truths: #1. I can't, #2. He can, #3 let Him!
- Why? So He receives all the credit for my success lest I boast. No flesh can take the credit for what He does in the Spirit.

- Perhaps the best example of this is Gideon. It wasn't just three steps, it was three strikes and he was out because he was a failure.
- He tells God that he's the black sheep of the family, his family is the black sheep of the tribe, and his tribe is the black sheep of Israel.
- This is why God chooses and uses Gideon and 300 weak and crippled Israelite failures to defeat the 135,000 strong elite Midianite army.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. NKJV

- This can bring unspeakable hope and encouragement. No matter who I am or how much of a failure I've been, God can still use me!
- God still loves me, and He's not through with me, because He can still fulfill His purpose in and through me so that it is for His glory.

- Actually, it's sort of a paradox in that our greatest failures can become our greatest successes. There aren't really any shortcuts.
- Show me a Christian who has never failed, and I'll show you that same one has never succeeded.
- I think this principal is personified in none other than the apostle Peter who failed repeatedly even denying the Lord three times.

- You've got to know that Peter thought that God was through with him. After all, he had just failed the Lord by denying him three times.
- Some believe that this is one of the reasons why he went back to his job as a fisherman after he had so miserably failed his Lord.