

## The Book of Jesus | Crossing Into the Land of Promise

### Presumption and Rest

Joshua 8.30ff

10.7.18

*Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, <sup>31</sup> just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no man had wielded an iron tool; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. <sup>32</sup> He wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel. <sup>33</sup> All Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first to bless the people of Israel. <sup>34</sup> Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. <sup>35</sup> 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 and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.*

We've been working our way through the Book of Joshua (sixth book of the Hebrew Bible – right after the Books of Moses) and this short passage is a kind of break in the action, a kind rest from the warfare and the other difficulties of that day.

This is the Israelites regrouping... and Moses who (of course) is now dead, Moses actually commanded this regrouping for the Israelites when they got into the Land of Promise.

It's a short passage but one of the most important in the book because it's a covenant renewal... the people of Abraham are now in the Land God has long promised to give them and they pause to reflect on who they are and what they're doing there.

And what makes this scene even more interesting is the two chapters we skipped... After the taking of Jericho they sort of rushed in to take the next city on their campaign and they are defeated (36 casualties) and they get a kind of "do-over"... after which they come to these two mountains and they DO what Moses prearranged for them to do.

Today I want to think about a phrase (coined by a German thinker – Carl von Clausewitz) called “the fog of war”. It’s when war or a struggle becomes so overwhelming that the participants lose their way... they may become irrational or disoriented and may think, say and do things they later regret.

And since we are ALL facing difficulty on any number of fronts (home, work, family, decisions, emotions, relationships, moral/spiritual life etc.) and we can all lose clarity (the fog of war) – it will be helpful to see how God’s ancient people experienced it and how they were rescued from it. Let’s look at 1) The Fog of War 2) The Clarity of Covenant 3) Alternating Between the Two  
Someone said, “Be kind to all the people you meet because everyone is fighting a difficult battle.” It’s really good to remember that – not only because it reminds us to be kind but because we seem to think we’re the only ones... as if other people have smooth sailing (we look around and everyone looks so together!)

And of course the spiritual life is described in any number of places in the Bible as a WAR: we wrestle NOT with flesh and blood but with spiritual powers – [Eph 6] there’s an unseen battle and we can easily find ourselves shrouded in the fog of war.

In that day, they were fighting flesh and blood AND the forces of evil as well. They followed orders, walked around Jericho the seven days, blew the seven trumpets, shouted and the walls fell down. And they destroyed the city and everything in it. It was an amputation of infected/contagious tissue but on a grand scale (a whole city!).

Then they rush on to take the City of Ai – maybe they’re feeling much more confident...maybe they're saying, “We got this!” They scout the city and decide to send just a small battalion because... “We got this!”

But it went very badly and they had to retreat and 36 were killed... And Joshua said, “Lord, I thought YOU were giving us the Land... what happened?”

And it turns out that a man named Achan took some gold when he was in the City of Jericho. He hid it in his tent (for a rainy day...) “What could it hurt?”

But God had clearly commanded against this... It was the moral/spiritual equivalent of not burning clothing that had been infected with the Ebola Virus because, “What could it hurt?” And spiritually, the metaphysics (the unseen realities) of keeping this gold would’ve had devastating effects on Israel.

And now, Achan, along with his entire family are become carriers of this spiritually deadly infection and they all have to die (difficult to read...I’m sure much MORE difficult to watch it!)

And after that very difficult experience where 36 soldiers died and it was traced to this man and then the whole house of Achan is executed... a disruption so big and devastating that they named the place "Achor" meaning "trouble"...and after that TROUBLE they go back and defeat the second city, Ai.

And in the aftermath...when the fog of war leaves them staggering and overwhelmed, then Joshua apparently remembered that Moses anticipated this moment and Moses (5x) was told by God to command Joshua to stop at this point and have a ceremony.

And I realize that at a time like this, when you're reeling from the battle...and you feel physically and emotionally and relationally and intellectually and... really in every way, you feel exhausted/confused ...now is not the time for a ceremony but again, counter-intuitively it turns out to be the very thing they need.

Joshua is to build an altar of raw stones – not carved or touched by human tools. Then there are offerings some are burnt completely (to acknowledge that all things belong to God) and other sacrifices are roasted and eaten as a fellowship meal ("peace offerings").

Then the symbol of God's presence (Ark) is there and the priests and all the people are gathered – that's repeated: men and women, young and old, Israelites and strangers living among them (like Rahab and a few Egyptians and maybe others who found shelter in God's church)... they gather between these two mountains.

Joshua blesses the people of Israel. And reads their constitution to them, the Law of Moses; reads the whole thing to the whole people...no one is excluded and no word is excluded.

God is taking His people... in all their whirlwind of confusion... struggle...sin...death...spiritual contagion and the fog of war...He sits them down and says, "You belong to ME – whatever your identity: men, women, old, young, even strangers who found refuge in My people, My church – you are My people and I have committed Myself to YOU... You belong to ME! That's who you are and I have constituted you (I've given you a constitution – My Torah/instruction) like no other people – you belong to Me!"

For a people dazed by a daily struggle that is simply beyond them... a people in a strange land tasked with claiming it... people facing the fog of war... God cuts through the confusion with the clarity of Covenant. "You belong to Me – trust Me and flourish or don't trust Me and fail...but what's most important is for you to know – I chose you, I rescued you, I married you and you are Mine!"

And do you see how the Greater Joshua, Yeshua Son of God, He not only read every word in the Law of Moses but fulfilled it ... obeyed it in my place.

He was the True Ark of the Covenant (the actual Presence of God – not just a symbol) and we gather around Him... and He is the Stone not cut by human hands that comes down from Heaven and shatters all the Kingdoms of this world (Dan 2.34).

He is the Altar (Heb 13.10) ...He is the Priest and He is the Sacrifice... He stood on the Mountain and gave us the New Constitution (the Sermon on the Mount) and then He went to the other Mountain – the place of cursing – Golgotha to be cursed in my place. (Gal 3.3)

He took no gold from this world and yet was treated like Achan and died in our Achor, our Trouble was assigned to Him.

And when we feel the stinging tears of sorrow... when we find ourselves just spent/exhausted and when we have perhaps become so disoriented by the fog of war, He comes to us and says to all who simply trust Him, “You belong to Me! “

It’s fantastically clarifying! In this world that so often feels like a war...when you find yourself in a job that pushes you past your limits...and you take it home with you and it all dances across your pillow so there’s no real rest.

When you're biting your tongue and find yourself lashing out and angry or frustrated or afraid and when you wonder, “Have I capitulated to this world; am I any better than Achan (coveting, discontent, disobedient, insecure) – wondering, “Do I even belong among these finely dressed people who seem to have it together... and let’s face it – I just don’t!”

Do you see that the Lord of the Covenant, the Greater and Perfect Joshua, Yeshua the Messiah is saying to you even now, “Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest! I am the Promised Land – abide in Me! I am your new identity and in Me you dentist or dog-walker, banker or bankrupt, male, female, old, young, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, stranger or insider – none of that really matters – YOU BELONG TO ME!”

He himself told us – life is a battle – we live in the fog of war as we are fighting for our families, praying for our loved ones, finding it hard to believe – the struggle is real and He says, “In this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer – I have overcome the world! I am the True Joshua and I have overcome the world!”

See, we alternate – the fog of war leaves us beaten and bloodied... but we keep on returning – hopefully many times each day, each week and then TODAY on this, His Day, the Day of Resurrection and New Creation we are reminded of the Covenant.

Richard Lovelace wrote, “Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther’s platform: You are accepted, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which

will produce increasing holiness of life as faith is active in love and gratitude.” (*Dynamics of Spiritual Life.*)

“Few know enough to start each day...” but let it not be said of us and don’t let it be said of you... Come often out of the fog of war and receive that acceptance, that new identity – the clarity of Covenant for all who belong to the True Joshua, Jesus Christ – for all who are believing in Him.

### **The Communion**

You may know that St Paul, the Apostle of Grace, he put a kind of “warning label” on this ritual meal. You can find it (it’s very serious) in First Corinthians CH 11 (vv.27ff). Our understanding (in the Presbyterian Church) is that to eat the right way you have to belong to Jesus Christ and be rooted in some church. If that doesn’t describe you then please take the warning seriously and look into it before you take the bread and wine... I can help you if you’ll come up and talk to me after the service today (I have a one-page little summary I can give you).

We alternate.

We go from living in a world that is promised to trouble us... “in this world you will have tribulation” We live in “the Valley of Achor”... BUT God is assembling us, He is calling us to His Mountain where He will again and again (Josh 9.33) pluck us from the fog of war and bring us into the Clarity of Covenant.

And here, at His Table, He actually says it, “THIS cup which is poured out for you IS the new covenant in My blood.” (Luk 22.20)

Do you see how the LORD of the Covenant – the True Joshua has married us and is now renewing us...reconstituting us... giving us something even better than the Law: He gives us the Gospel...He gives us HIMSELF... the peace-offering, the sacrifice that is both given to God on our behalf and eaten by us, the Covenant People... our Sustenance.

BE DEFINED BY THIS... be renewed in this covenant and be strengthened for the battle.

Let’s Pray.