

The Danger Of Victory Pt 2

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Turn tonight in your Bibles to Joshua 7. Let's read beginning at the second verse,

“2 And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. 3 And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. 4 So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.”

Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for your goodness and for your faithfulness. We should never tire of thanking and praising you for your mercies that are new every morning. And thank you for bringing us to this place tonight, as Brother Benny prayed earlier, it's not any accident that we're here, it is our hap to light upon this piece of ground that belongs to our Boaz, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that you would speak to our hearts from your word tonight that we might examine ourselves before you and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tonight we want to continue thinking about the danger of victory. The danger of victory. Whenever I have come to Joshua 7 over the years, my focus has always been on Achan and certainly we ought to focus on this man, the Lord certainly does, and as the Lord leads, we'll do that but there's another man in this chapter that we ought to focus on and that man is Joshua. You look at this chapter and there is much more detail about what Joshua did than there is about what Achan did. We learn what Achan did in the very first verse of this chapter and then we hear his words of confession in verses 20-21. That's three verses, the other 23 verses deal with Joshua, what he did, what he said, how he reacted in these circumstances and so that's what we want to do tonight is to focus our attention on Joshua.

This morning we look at something of the history of Joshua, albeit brief, and we saw that he was a man who loved the Lord; he was a man who served the Lord; he was a man who walked with the Lord but he was a man. He was a man. One of the incredible things

about this book is the way that God does not shy away or hesitate to expose very frankly and very directly the sins of his people, even the heroes of the faith. This was the subject of this past Tuesday's devotional from "A Closer Look at the Evidence." It was taken from the book "Evidence That Demands A Verdict." I don't know if you've got that book at the bookstore but...you do, very good. The folks that put this little devotional book together, "A Closer Look at the Evidence," recommended that as a book that is certainly worth having and reading. The point in the devotional was that when men write biographies, they tend to exaggerate the character traits of the person that they're writing about depending on the point of view of the author, of course. Generally, if someone is writing about some national hero or someone who is held in high regard, then what happens is the author will write about the accomplishments of this person and then mention little or nothing of their personal failures and their short-comings. The Bible isn't like that.

We've just spend some time in our recent messages in the genealogy of Pharez and that genealogy in the book of Ruth led us to the first chapter of the first book in the New Testament and Matthew begins the New Testament with, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ," and the first human name that we find in that genealogy is the name of David. David was an adulterer and a murderer. The next name is Abraham. Abraham was a liar. His name is followed by Isaac, the liar. And Jacob, the deceiver. And Judah, the whoremonger. And Tamar, who played the harlot. And Rahab, who was a harlot. And Ruth, who was a stranger and an alien to Israel from the washpot of Moab. As you go on down through that genealogy in Matthew 1, you'll find Solomon who loved many strange women. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. You'll find his mother, Bathsheba, who committed adultery with King David. You'll find Manasseh, who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. What we learn in studying these genealogies is that there is no depth to which the love and mercy of the grace of God cannot reach. That's the first and foremost thing that you learn in studying the genealogies of these people.

But we also learn that God doesn't hesitate to expose their sins and he does that to show us not their heart but our sins in our hearts. He does it to show us the total depravity of our own heart and our need for him. That's true when it comes to this man Joshua and we're going to look at him tonight in a little different way than we did this morning. Notice, again, Joshua 7:2, "And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai." Joshua, we're looking at his preparations for the battle of Ai. Jericho has been conquered. Ai is the next city. We find as we begin to study his preparations, that his preparation at least in the beginning for the battle of Ai, is the same as the preparation for the battle of Jericho. Look back at Joshua 2 for just a minute and look at verse 1, "And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, even Jericho." Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua sent out two men to spy out the land. He did exactly the same thing as he prepares to go against Ai. We don't know how many men he sent. We're told that he sent two to spy out Jericho and here we are told in chapter 7 and verse 2 that he "sent men" but we don't know how many. It doesn't really matter, he's doing the same thing, he is following the same pattern.

But I want us to see that there is a hint of trouble. There is a hint of trouble. The first hint of trouble, the first hint that there has been a change in the attitude of the people of God comes in the report of these spies. Now, look at verse 23 of chapter 2. We want to read the report of the first two spies who went to Jericho. Joshua 2:23, "So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them: And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us." Please notice, if you will, how the report of these two spies begins. Their report begins with the Lord and the truth of his word and the certainty of his promises to his people. God said to Joshua in chapter 1 of this book, in verse 2, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast." That's how the report of these two spies begins. It begins with this claim of the promise of God. It begins with this claim of the truthfulness and the certainty of the promises of God. "And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land." That's what he said. That's what we're finding.

That report, if you stop and think about it, sounds a whole lot like the report that Joshua and Caleb, when they were spies 40 years earlier, it sounds a whole lot like the report that they gave. They said, "Fear not. Don't fear the people of the land for they are bread for us. Their defense has departed from them and the Lord is with us. Fear them not." Here's Joshua, 40 years later, hearing the same thoughts, hearing the same basic words, if you will, from these two young men. "Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land," that's what he said, "for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."

Now, look back at chapter 7 and verse 2. "And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few." Do you hear the difference in these two reports? The report of the spies to Joshua concerning Jericho claims the promises of the word of God. The report of the men concerning Ai doesn't even mention the Lord. The report before Jericho rested on the word of God. The report before Ai rested on the wisdom of men. This is the first hint that there's trouble among the people of Israel. This is the first hint that the people of Israel have let the place of dependence on the Lord and are bending, they're trending toward independence from him. They're trending toward dependence upon themselves.

There's a verse of Scripture that I believe provides a commentary of what's happening here. In Judges 7, Gideon is going out to fight the army of the Midianites and at the beginning, he has an army of 32,000 men to go against them and in Judges 7:2, God said this to Gideon, "The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites

into their hands.” Now listen to the Lord’s next words, “lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath delivered me.” I believe that is the attitude that is coming through here in Joshua 7. These people had no power against Jericho. They could not go over the wall. They could not dig under the wall. They could not ram their way through the way. Jericho was perfectly defended. It was perfectly defended. It was shut up. We see in chapter 6, verse 1, “Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.” That place was a fortress. It was a fortress and the only way for the armies of Israel to get in that fortress was by a miracle of God and he performed that miracle. We talked a little bit about the scope and the magnitude of that miracle this morning in the word “flat,” how the walls fell down flat. There was no rubble. There weren’t tons of stones and rocks for the people to have to get through to get into the city. The walls fell down flat.

This was an incredible miracle and yet in the face of that miracle, here these people are in this third verse of chapter 7 saying, “Let not all the people go up, just let about two or three thousand men go up and smite the city of Ai. Let’s don’t make all the people to go up.” Boy, I bet that made them popular, didn’t it? “Let’s don’t gather up the whole army here. There’s no point in doing that. There’s just a few people in Ai. There are just a few.” I believe that what these people are doing in this third verse is what we just read: God’s assessment of the people of Israel in the book of Judges. They’re vaunting themselves against God and the attitude of their heart is, “Mine own hand hath delivered me.” Their attitude here is, “We don’t need God to conquer Ai.” We needed him to conquer Jericho.

Brother Jed Taylor, I believe, and it’s a note in one of my other Bibles, I believe it was a number of years ago that he preached some messages from the book of Joshua and one of the things he brought out was when you read Joshua 6, what you can write over that chapter and he said it and I wrote it in my Bible because I thought it was such an excellent point: Jericho represents things we can’t handle and so we need the Lord for those things; Ai represents those things we think we can handle. I think Brother Jed had that summed up exactly right and these things that we think that we can handle, we have this different attitude of heart. “We don’t need God to conquer Ai. All we need is 2-3,000 men. All we need is ourselves.” Before we criticize these people too much, we’d better stop and ask ourselves a question: has there ever been a wall of Jericho in our life? Has there ever been in our life some obstacle, some problem, some circumstance that we couldn’t climb over and we couldn’t dig under it, we couldn’t dig out of it and we couldn’t force our way through it? The only way around it was by a miracle of God? And he performed it when we cast ourselves before him and our heart was, “O our God, we have no might against these circumstances. We don’t have any might against this problem. We don’t have any might against this obstacle. We don’t have any might against this wall of difficulty that confronts us. Neither do we know what to do but our eyes are upon thee.” When we pray that prayer, when that’s the attitude of our heart, the Lord caused that wall to fall down flat and he gave us victory and he gave us deliverance and yet within a few days, at the very next battle, at the very next set of circumstances or difficulties, instead of learning and living in the light of this lesson of dependence, what

did we do? We vaunted ourselves against the Lord and we set out in our own strength and in the power of ourselves. Mine own hand hath delivered me. I can handle this.”

You see, we’re just like these people. Verse 3 of Joshua 7 is the first hint that something is wrong in Israel. It’s the first hint of the danger in victory. The danger of victory is leaving the place of dependence upon God and going to the place of dependence upon ourselves. Verse 4 of Joshua 7 is not a hint that something is wrong, verse 4 is a loud, screaming confirmation that something is wrong. Verse 4 says, “So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men.” The loud confirmation that something is wrong in this verse is that Joshua listened to the voice of these men. Notice again the words of verse 3, “And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him.” These spies, however many there were, they made their report, they made their recommendation directly to Joshua and he followed it. He followed it down to the number of men that he sent to Ai. They said, “All we need to do is send 2-3,000,” and what did Joshua do? “So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men.” Folks, that’s not what happened at Jericho. That is not what happened at Jericho. Remember what we read in chapter 2, verse 23? “So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them: And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.”

With that in mind, look over at chapter 5 and verse 13. So Joshua’s gotten the report of the spies and they’re moving toward Jericho and Joshua was like any other commander. I picture this as being the night before the battle. It doesn’t say that but it comes to my mind that it’s the night before the battle and these thoughts are in his mind and he’s walking. We see there in verse 13, “And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?” Will you notice those words: what saith my Lord unto his servant? Joshua had received the report of the spies, it was a report that began with the Lord. It was a report that was based on the truth of his word, the certainty of his promises to his people and that’s going around in Joshua’s mind, I believe, as he’s by Jericho. But here he is preparing for the battle and what is his attitude of heart? It’s not what the spies said to him. It’s not what man said to him. Joshua’s attitude of heart came from one place and one place only: what saith my Lord unto his servant? What saith my Lord? What do you say, Lord? What do you say?

Joshua 5:15, “And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.” Now, let’s go directly from there to verse 2 of chapter 6 because I believe this is what the captain of the host of the Lord said to his servant. Joshua said, “What saith my Lord unto his servant? We’re here. We’re getting ready for the battle.” Look at chapter 6:2 and we’ll see what he said, “And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the

city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.” Before the battle of Jericho come spies and he receives the report of the spies and then he falls on his face to the earth and he worships the Lord Jesus Christ, the captain of the host of the Lord, and says, “What saith my Lord unto his servant?”

And when Joshua goes to the Lord with that attitude of heart, what does the Lord do? He gives Joshua his plan for the battle. He gives Joshua his plan for the battle. We just read it. But then we come to Ai and Joshua sends out the spies. Check. And he receives the report of the spies. Check. Then he acts on the report of the spies. What’s missing? There is no falling on his face to the earth and worshipping the Lord Jesus. There is no cry from his heart before the battle of Ai, “What saith my Lord unto his servant?” And so Joshua receives no battle plan from the captain of the host of the Lord and 3,000 men then go up to Ai with no plan. They go up with no plan and they fled before the men of Ai. Look at chapter 7, verse 5,

“5 And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.”

At Jericho, Joshua got his battle plan from the Lord and the result was victory. At Ai, Joshua got his battle plan from men and the result was defeat. I wonder if we understand that. We’d better because if we’re saved tonight, we’re in a battle every day and that battle is called life in this world for the believer. And where we get our battle plan is going to determine if we’ll have victory or defeat in the Christian life. And the way of victory for the believer is to take the report of the two spies that God has sent to search out our hearts and who are those two spies? It’s his word. The two spies at the Old Testament and the New Testament and God has sent them here to spy out and search out and expose our hearts. We’re to take that report and we’re to believe it and then we’re to come before the captain of the host of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we’re to fall on our face to the earth and worship and say unto him as we lie prostrate before him, “What saith my Lord unto his servant? What saith my Lord unto his servant?” And when we come before the Lord and that’s the attitude of our heart, he’ll give us the battle plan.

He’ll give us the battle plan and the battle plan is Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” The battle plan is to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily and follow him. The battle plan is to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The battle plan is to submit ourselves to God, resist the devil and he’ll flee from you. The battle plan is to draw nigh to God and he’ll draw nigh to you. The battle plan is to cleanse

your hands, ye sinners and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. The battle plan is to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting one another and so much more as you see the day approaching. The result of God's battle plan is we go to him and we say to him, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" The results of God's battle plan is victory in the Christian life but when we get our battle plan from man, when we get it from ourselves, when we go our own way as Joshua and Israel did, the result will be defeat like it was for Israel at Ai.

In verse 6 of Joshua 7, the Lord shows us something in the life of Joshua that is very indicative of our life after the fact. In verse 6, after the fact, after listening to the counsel of men, after following the counsel of men, after the defeat at the hands of the enemy, then Joshua rends his clothes and falls on his face before the ark and the elders of Israel. After the fact. After listening to the counsel of men. After the defeat at the hands of the enemy. Then Joshua calls on the Lord. Look at verse 7,

"7 And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! 8 O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? 10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11 Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff."

In verse 11 God says, "Israel hath sinned." Now first and foremost and the Spirit of God tells us this very plainly, that applies to the nation of Israel here because of the sin of Achan. This chapter begins,

"1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel."

First and foremost, those words "Israel has sinned" applies to the nation of Israel because of the sin of Achan. But if I might, I would like to suggest a secondary meaning of those words "Israel has sinned," and it's what we've been talking about tonight. It's what we've been talking about in regard to the difference between Jericho and Ai, in regard to the dependence upon the Lord in Jericho and the dependence upon themselves in Ai. At Jericho, Israel was totally and completely dependent upon God. At Ai, they were dependent upon themselves and I believe that we can apply those words in verse 11 to the attitude of the people of God here at Ai, Israel has sinned. Israel has sinned.

In Joshua 8, we don't have time to really look at it in any detail but in Joshua 8 after the sin in the camp is dealt with, the sin of Achan and I believe the sin of dependence upon themselves and the sin of vaunting themselves against God, the sin of having the attitude of their heart, "My own hand hath delivered me," the sin of saying, "We can handle Ai." In chapter 8 after the sin is dealt with, Joshua again gets his battle plan from the Lord and he follows that plan as he did at Jericho and the city is defeated. Look at chapter 8, verse 1, "And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed," look at what God's instructions were. Man's instructions were: "Oh, let's just take 2-3,000 people up there." God says, "take all the people of war with thee." He would have told him that the first time if he had asked him. "And arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land: And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves," listen to the last part of verse 2, "lay thee an ambush for the city behind it." And that's exactly what Joshua did. It's exactly what he did and they defeated the city of Ai, they conquered it.

You see, Joshua learned from his sin and the Lord doesn't hide this sin from us, the Lord doesn't hide the difference between Jericho and Ai in this man's life. He exposed it so that we might see ourselves tonight. And think about this question: which city describes our preparation for the spiritual battles of life that we face every day? Which one of these cities describes our preparation for the spiritual battles of life that we face every day? Is it Jericho? Or is it Ai?

Let's close in a word of prayer.

Our Father, we thank you again tonight for an opportunity to look into your word and see ourselves, see the tendencies of our own heart demonstrated right before our eyes in the lives of these people that you don't hide their sin and you don't hide their weaknesses from us. You show them to us. You show us their sin and you show us their weaknesses so that we might see ourselves and help us to see ourselves tonight and help us to examine ourselves and see which city the preparation for the battle of Jericho or the preparation for the battle of Ai, which one of those cities describes our preparation for the spiritual battles that we face every day. We pray that we might do that, that we might walk with you and serve you and be a blessing and a testimony here in this world. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.