

FBC POWELL, 10-2-16 AM NOTES
"DEALING WITH FAILURE GOD'S WAY"
JOSHUA 8:1-29
8 in Series, "A Vision Fulfilled"

Proverbs 28:13 "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

Joshua 7:2-4a "Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, 'Go up and spy out the land.' So the men went up and spied out Ai. They returned to Joshua and said to him, 'Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up...'"

Joshua 7:4b-5 "...but they fled from the men of Ai. The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water."

"Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes; organize victories out of mistakes."
– F. W. Robertson

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat." –Theodore Roosevelt

I. A New Start (vv. 1-2a)

"The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings."

– Dr. Alexander Whyte (1836-1921)

Lamentations 3:22-23 "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Philippians 3:13b-14 "...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

II. A New Strategy (vv. 2b-9)

III. A New Success (vv. 19-29)

Genesis 15:16 (NIV) "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Malachi 3:6a "For I, the Lord, do not change..."

First Baptist Church Powell 10 02 2016 AM

Sermon 8: Dealing with Failure God's Way

Series: A Vision Fulfilled

Joshua 8:1-29

It is hard to understand how amazing Joshua 8 is until you understand what had just happened in Joshua 7. If you had to pick one word to describe Joshua 7, it would be "failure." It was not the failure of just one man named Achan, and his family; it was widespread failure. Let me set the scene. After God had miraculously delivered the impregnable city of Jericho to Israel, the next task in fulfilling the vision to possess the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, was to take a small city called Ai. Ai was a seemingly insignificant city, but it had great strategic significance. It was located in the hill country, and from Ai all of the main routes into Canaan, the Promised Land, could be watched and guarded. The taking of Ai should have gone off without a hitch. The population of Ai was only 12,000 people. There were close to 2 million Israelites and the Israelite army numbered about 600,000. But when a small force of Israelites attacked Ai, they were soundly defeated. Little Ai caused the mighty nation of Israel to run away in defeat. Thirty-six soldiers died and Israel was humiliated.

Who failed? The obvious failure was the failure of a man named Achan and his family who took treasure from the ruins of Jericho and hid it. Achan stole from God, and his concealed, secret sin resulted in Israel's defeat and caused his own death along with the death of his family who were co-conspirators. Proverbs 28:13: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

In the last message, we saw that there was also failure on the part of Israel and especially Joshua. There was the failure of pride and prayerlessness. After Jericho, somehow it seems that the Israelites thought that they were responsible for the victory. In reality, Jericho was God's victory! All that the Israelites did was march around the city, blow ram's horns, and yell real loud; it was God who destroyed the walls of Jericho and gave the people of the city over to the Israelites. When Joshua sent spies to "check out" Ai, they came back with a real cocky attitude. Joshua 7:2-4a "Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, 'Go up and spy out the land.' So the men went up and spied out Ai. They returned to Joshua and said to him, 'Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up...' " Can't you sense the pride? They didn't need to take the whole army – two or three thousand would be plenty. Here is what happened. Joshua 7:4b-5 "...but they fled from the men of Ai. The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water." Not only was there a failure involving prideful trust in their own abilities, there was a failure to pray and seek God's guidance and power.

When we get to chapter 8, there was nothing but gloom and doom in Israel's camp. They had failed. Their glorious vision of taking the promised land of Canaan was now fading. Let's make this personal. How do we individually, and as a church, respond to failure? F. W. Robertson was a famous British preacher. In a sermon on August 12, 1849 he said, "Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes; organize victories out of mistakes." [Quoted in Warren Weirsbe, *Be Strong*, page 95]

We must deal with our failures caused by sin with genuine heart felt confession and repentance, but when we have laid ourselves bare before the Lord, we are to accept His gracious forgiveness and get back in the fight. My favorite Theodore Roosevelt quote is this one:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do

the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

[www.goodreads.com].

From Joshua 8, let's see how God led Israel to deal with defeat and failure. There will be so much application in this passage to every person here. One thing we all have in common is that we have all failed, we have all fallen short, and we need encouragement to get up and get back in the battle. Be blessed by these glorious truths.

I. A New Start (v 1-2a)

God is a God of grace. Instead of forsaking His people and His leader of the people, He exhorts Joshua to not give in to fear and dismay. The HCSB says, "Do not be afraid or discouraged." God in these verses is affirming His promise to give the Israelites the land. He is gently saying to Joshua and the Israelites, "It's time to move on; there is work to do." Dr. Alexander Whyte (1836-1921), the well-known Scottish pastor said, "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings." [Quoted in Warren Weirsbe, page 96]

In our discouragement, God says, "My promises still stand; trust me and get about doing what needs to be done." God is not through with you!

Lamentations 3:22-23: "The Lord's loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Philippians 3:13b-14: "...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

As I have said so many times before, the problem with so many Christians is that they have their headlights on their rear bumper. They only see their past.

Over these almost forty years that I've been a pastor, I have noticed two different wrong ways that people deal with their failure. There are some that seem to just disregard or treat flippantly their failures, their sins. They sort of "laugh it off" and make flippant comments like, "Hey, nobody is perfect; I messed up and you just need to get over it." At the other extreme, there are some who seem to genuinely repent and turn from their sin, but refuse to accept God's new start, God's forgiveness and then move on. It is like they build a monument to their failure and spend the rest of their life at the foot of their monument. They seem to be identified by their sin. God's way is to repent and confess and accept the earthly consequences while encircled by God's grace and move on with what God has called you to do.

I am thankful for the fact that God, in His Word, shows us the heroes of the faith warts and all. Abraham lied to a pagan king and lost his witness. God used Abraham mightily after his sin. Samson was a "he-man with a she-weakness" and yet in repentance, God used him in his death more than in his life. David was a man who sinned and suffered the earthly consequences of that sin, and yet he was a man who knew how to repent and he wrote so much about God's mercy and forgiveness that has so helped countless thousands over the years who have read and been comforted by Psalms like Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. When God summarized David's life, He called him "a man after God's own heart." John Mark was a quitter who turned back from a commitment to aid Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey. This "quitter" obviously repented and God used him to write the second of the four Gospels. Peter cursed and swore and denied the Lord. He repented and was known as the chief of the apostles and history tells us that he died a martyr's death rather than deny the Lord. That's just scratching the surface! Failure is not final! Don't make a monument to your failures. Repent and then get back in the battle.

In Joshua 8, God tells Joshua to not fear or be dismayed, and to do what he's been told to do – go take Ai. God promises him that He will defeat Ai just as He defeated Jericho. The methodology would be different, but God would bring the victory. God never brings up the defeat at Ai to belittle or condemn Israel or Joshua.

II. A New Strategy (v 2b-19)

The strategy that God gave Joshua was so brilliant that the Israeli Army still studies Joshua's (really God's) tactics of warfare. What God did was to use the failure Israel had experienced earlier to deceive and bring about the defeat of Ai. God uses Ai's confidence against them just as Israel's false confidence had set them up for failure in their defeat at the hands of Ai. We read about the amazing strategy in Joshua 8:2b-13. This is brilliant!

Thirty thousand warriors go out under the cover of darkness and march fifteen miles from Gilgal to Ai. Joshua set up an ambush beside the city from the west. He then put 5,000 men between Ai and Bethel. This group was probably put there to make sure the army from Bethel could not come to Ai's aid. The terrain around Ai made it easy to hide the soldiers. The plan was simple but worked perfectly. Joshua took the remainder of his soldiers and made a frontal attack on Ai from the north. As they got close, they pretended to turn and flee as they had before. The people of Ai left the security of their city to chase the seemingly fleeing Israelites. Once the people of Ai were a good distance from the city, Joshua gave a signal to the soldiers who were hiding close to the city. They came out of hiding and went into the unprotected city and set it on fire. Now the people of Ai were caught between the two groups of Israelites. This plan was brilliant and it worked perfectly.

III. A New Success (v 19-29)

The destruction of Ai and all of its inhabitants was not as some have called it, "the slaughter of the innocents." Israel was the instrument of God's judgment on a wicked people who had resisted His truth, grace, and mercy for several hundred years. God is merciful and gracious to all whom turn away from sin and turn to Him, but He is a holy God who does judge sin. He is very patient with mankind, but His patience eventually runs out. Speaking of the residents of Canaan, God says in Genesis 15:16 (NIV): "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." By the time we get to Joshua 8, the "sin of the Amorites" (residents of Canaan) had reached its full measure.

Before we move on to the next point, I want to make sure that we understand some things about God and how He works. When we speak of the attributes and character of God, He never changes. Malachi 3:6a: "For I, the Lord, do not change..." While God Himself never changes, He often changes His methods and strategy. He is the God of infinite variety. I think that the reason He often changes His methods is because He desires for us to trust *Him* and not some *method*. That is why it is so important that we seek His will in every undertaking. God's methodology for taking Ai did not involve the type of miracle that they saw at Jericho. At Ai, it was a God given excellent military strategy. Instead of marching around the city or blowing the rams' horns or shouting loud at the appointed time, it was the soldiers and the strategy that God used to bring victory.

Often pastors and church leaders try to "put God in a box" so to speak. We see Him work through some strategy in one place and soon, everyone is copying that strategy. When it comes to strategy – how we accomplish God's tasks that He has given us – we must be open to change, but be very careful about copying the latest mega-church methodology.

The old fashioned evangelist, Vance Havner (now with the Lord) tells the imaginary "rest of the story" of the three people Jesus healed of blindness in the Gospels. He imagined that when these three people got together, one said, "Jesus touched my eyes and I could instantly see." The other man said, "Well He touched mine and I could see forms and then He touched them again and I had 20/20 vision." The third said, "When he healed my blindness, He spit in the dirt, made mud, put it on my eyes, and when I washed it off, I could perfectly see." Then Havner imagines them arguing about how God heals blindness and soon they each form a church. There was, "The Church of the One Touch", "The Church of the Second Touch", and "The Church of Mud in Your Eye."

The methodology that God gives will never contradict His Word, but methodology often changes and we need to let God choose when the walls fall down miraculously or when good prayed through strategy that doesn't necessarily involve miracles is used.

Conclusion

Failure need not be final. It's time to repent and confess any sin involved, accept God's gracious forgiveness, get back to serving Him. There are plenty of Ai's to conquer. Don't stand on the sidelines.