

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*From Victory to Defeat.*"

Go ahead and open your Bibles to **Joshua 21** and I will open us in prayer.

This morning's sermon has been on my heart for a while. I started working on it over a year ago, but then everything took place with COVID, and the sermons that accompanied it, such as those on wisdom and knowledge, putting off preaching this.

Every few years I share about the vision of our church. The last time was over 7 years ago, January 2014, so we're probably due.

This sermon will help set up those sermons.

Let me remind you of some verses that are important to keep in mind when we're studying the Old Testament:

- **1 Corinthians 10:6** These things [in the Old Testament] took place as examples for us...11 [and] happened to [Israel] as an example, [and] were written down for our instruction.
- **Romans 15:4** [the Old Testament] was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

So the New Testament says we're supposed to learn from the Old Testament.

I've told you before that people will look at the Old Testament and wonder what they are supposed to learn from it. Generally, the difficulty comes from seeing what's taking place and knowing there is little chance of that happening in our lives. For example:

- In the books of Kings and Chronicles, kings were forced to defend against enemy nations attacking them and we know we're not going to have to defend a nation against enemy nations.
- Or in the books of Joshua and Judges we know we are never going to enter a land that God has given us and be commanded to exterminate the people living there.

Generally, we will do well if we look at what is happening physically, and apply it spiritually...much like we do in the Gospels:

- Jesus healed physical blindness and deafness, but we don't think He heals every blind and deaf person.
- We understand He wants to heal our spiritual blindness and deafness, so we can spiritually see and hear.

Similarly, we don't face enemy nations attacking us, but we do face enemies. We can look at how Kings responded to their physical enemies to see how we should respond to our spiritual enemies.

If we zoom in on the books of Joshua and Judges, we should understand – based on **Hebrews 3 and 4** – that the Promised Land is a picture of the spiritual rest we have in Christ. And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson one: the Promised Land is a picture of spiritual rest in Christ.

Let me give you some verses that support this.

Look at **Joshua 21:44**...

Joshua 21:44 And the Lord GAVE THEM REST ON EVERY SIDE just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands.

God gave Israel physical rest.

Look one chapter to the right at **Joshua 22:4**...

Joshua 22:4 And now the Lord your God HAS GIVEN REST to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

The Promised Land gave the people physical rest and it prefigures, or foreshadows, the spiritual rest that Christ offers us...

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

Briefly look at **Joshua 13:1**...

Joshua 13:1 Now Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the Lord said to him, “You are old and advanced in years, and THERE REMAINS YET VERY MUCH LAND TO POSSESS.

If we understand the Promised Land spiritually, then we see how this wonderfully applies to Christ:

- We receive Christ spiritually the way the nation of Israel received the Promised Land physically.
- You remember people couldn't enter the land because of their unbelief, and nobody finds themselves in Christ if they are unbelieving.
- Although Israel owned all the land, they still had more of it to possess. Similarly, **Ephesians 1:3 the Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.** Although we own all these spiritual blessings, we always have more of Christ to possess.

- In their pursuit they kept encountering enemies that had to be defeated. In our pursuit to possess all of the blessings we have in Christ we keep encountering enemies that must be defeated:
 - The Israelites faced Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites
 - We face the devil, the world, and the flesh

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Now, let me pause this discussion for a moment, and share something else you...

If you get an elevated view of the historical books of the Bible you probably know that with only a few exceptions – such as Ruth and Esther – each book picks up where the previous book left off:

- Exodus picks up where Genesis left off
- Leviticus picks up where Exodus left off
- Numbers picks up where Leviticus left off

This allows the historical books to read almost like one book, with each book serving almost as a chapter of a larger book covering the history of the nation of Israel.

But between two of the books there's a change that is so sharp it could almost seem like you missed something. You're sort of looking at where one book ended and the next one began wondering if there should be some book in between explaining the dramatic change.

I'm referring to the books of Joshua and Judges:

- Joshua is largely a book of victories: with only a few exceptions Israel moves through the land experiencing victory after victory.
- The Book of Judges is the opposite: with only a few exceptions Israel moves from one loss to another...as you probably know the book is a cycle of Israel's defeats.

As much as Joshua is victory, after victory, after victory, Judges is defeat, after defeat, after defeat.

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Now keeping in mind from **1 Corinthians 10** and **Romans 15** that we are supposed to learn from the Old Testament, when we see something this dramatic take place, we should ask why it happened.

There's a passage in **Judges 2** that explains why Israel went from victory to defeat. Go ahead and turn there.

Look at **verse 7**...

Judges 2:7 And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.

This sounds good, because it says **the people served the Lord**, but do you see the repeated phrase that reveals potential problems?

all the days of

We know **the people serve the Lord all the days of** Joshua and the elders, but what about after that?

We get to see what happened in the next few verses when Joshua passed away...

Judges 2:8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 110 years. 9 And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. 10 And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

Watch them go from victory to defeat...

Judges 2:11 And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. 12 And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger.

Now let's dig into these verses to see how this happened.

If we look back at **verse 10** we can see two things wrong with the new generation...

What's the first thing listed?

First, it says they **did not know the Lord**:

- This doesn't mean they didn't know OF Him.
- Of course they knew who He was.

It means they didn't know the Lord personally as their fathers did. This is Old Testament language for salvation. Many of the new generation were not believers.

And this brings us to the first part of lesson two...

Lesson two: Israel moved from victory to defeat because they did not (part one) know the Lord.

In our vision for WCC, there are many things we desire for our people. What are some of those things?

We desire:

- Strong marriages
- Healthy families
- Unity, joy, peace
- A good witness to the community
- Generous, loving, servant-oriented people

But I'd say these pale in comparison to the most foundational desire we should have: that we know the Lord.

I'd go so far as to say if we were able to see all these other things in our church, but we don't know the Lord, we have nothing to boast about...

Jeremiah 9:23 Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and KNOWS ME.

We are not supposed to boast, but apparently if there is one thing we can boast about, it is that we **understand** and **know** God.

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No matter how much I might enjoy teaching the Word – which is to say teaching ABOUT God – as your pastor I have a strong desire for you to KNOW God.

It's not enough to simply learn about God. We must also be born again and have a relationship with Him.

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So how can we see this happen at WCC?

While I – and the other teachers in the church – can't change your hearts or convert you, the one thing we can do is preach the Gospel faithfully.

Also, I would also say if you're a parent, you should be preaching the Gospel to your children...or here's another way to say it...

It's the vision of WCC that parents would be preaching the Gospel to their children regularly.

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Also, we can model the Gospel through our faithfulness to Christ.

While none of us will be perfect representatives of Christ, hopefully – by God's grace – we would be faithful enough that our children - and others - would see Christ through us.

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Looking back at **verse 10**, what is the second thing listed?

It says they didn't know **the work that [God] had done for Israel.**

This almost looks like it's saying the same thing as the previous part of the verse - that Israel didn't **know the Lord** - but it's saying something different. These words mean this generation didn't know what God had done.

I take this to mean they had no personal awareness of His power. Think of what their parents experienced:

- The plagues on Egypt

- Walking through the Red Sea
- The manna in the wilderness
- The water from the Rock

God was someone their parents related to and who did great things for that generation...but they didn't know these things themselves.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 2...

Lesson two: Israel moved from victory to defeat because they did not (part two) remember what the Lord had done.

If we're saved – which is to say we know the Lord – we should also know what He has done...and I see two ways this applies:

1. We should know what He has done for Israel
2. We should know what He has done for us

Let's briefly talk about each of these...

First, we should know what God has done for Israel, which is to say we should know our Bibles.

Sometimes people get saved, but they don't grow in their knowledge and understanding of God. Their theology is poor. They'll talk about God, but they don't know what they're talking about.

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It's the vision of WCC that our people know the work God has done by teaching the Word faithfully.

Generations are coming up that don't know **the work the Lord had done for Israel**, any more than the generation in Judges, because churches don't want to teach the Bible...and why is this?

- It's not glamorous enough
- It's too boring
- It won't entertain people
- It's not relevant
- People won't come back to church if that's all they get

As a result, many other things end up replacing the simple preaching of God's Word:

- Videos
- Theatrics, such as plays and skits and interpretive dance
- There must be some dog-and-pony show because if we only preach the Word it won't cut it

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Then if the Word is preached, it seems like it must be attached to something in the culture to be contemporary and relevant. Pastors must tie their sermons to:

- Social media
- The newest movie

- A sports team
- Some celebrity

Simply because the Word isn't enough

One of the problems with this is:

- It raises up a generation that knows a lot about the Avengers
- But it's like the generation in Judges that **didn't know the work the Lord has done**

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Second, we should know what God has done for us.

When I see that this new generation forgot what God had done for them, it makes me want to remember what God has done for me...and pass that along to my children.

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On Saturday mornings I have been meeting with a group of young men to read through the book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. As the title indicates, it is about different spiritual disciplines, such as:

- Bible reading
- Prayer
- Worship
- Evangelism
- Serving

Last week's chapter was about journaling. I have never been much of a journaler. If I have anything worth writing down I usually add it to my notes so that I can remember to put in a sermon.

The part of the chapter that most made me want to do a better job journaling was a discussion of forgetting things God has done if we don't journal. It saddens me to think of all the things God's done in my life that I won't remember.

The other night as a family we were discussing different prayers God has answered for us, and different things He's done for us. It was a long, wonderful discussion that I hope we don't forget.

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To see the third reason that the nation of Israel went from victory to defeat, I'd like you to look back at the beginning of the chapter.

Go ahead and read with me starting at verse one...

Judges 2:1 Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, 2 and you shall (notice this...) MAKE NO COVENANT WITH THE INHABITANTS OF THIS LAND; you shall break down their altars.' But you HAVE NOT OBEYED MY VOICE. What is this you have done?"

They were told not to associate with the surrounding nations, but they did anyway, and this brings us to the next part of lesson two...

Lesson two: Israel moved from victory to defeat because they did not (part three) remain holy.

I've told you a few times that you should associate the word holy, or holiness, with separation, and if you look at holiness this way it reveals the other main reason Israel went from victory to defeat.

God called Israel to be holy, or separate, from the surrounding nations, but they chose to have relationships with them.

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You could say, "Why did they do that?"

Let me show you by having you look one chapter to the left. Your Bibles might have a heading around **verse 27**, saying something like:

- Incomplete Conquest of the Land
- Places not Conquered
- Failure to Complete the Conquest

This is a passage discussing each tribe's failure to drive out all the Canaanites. Let me draw your attention to a few verses so you notice the theme...

- **Judges 1:28** When Israel grew strong, they **PUT THE CANAANITES TO FORCED LABOR**, but did not drive them out completely. **29** And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites lived in Gezer **AMONG THEM**.
- **30** Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, or the inhabitants of Nahalol, so the Canaanites **LIVED AMONG THEM**, but **BECAME SUBJECT TO FORCED LABOR**.
- **32** so the Asherites **LIVED AMONG THE CANAANITES**, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. **33** Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, so they **LIVED AMONG THE CANAANITES**, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath **BECAME SUBJECT TO FORCED LABOR FOR THEM**.
- **35** The Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they **BECAME SUBJECT TO FORCED LABOR**.

So why did the Israelites let the Canaanites remain?

Four times it says they made them **forced labor**.

The Israelites let the Canaanites remain, because they wanted to let them remain. They made them slaves. They enjoyed their existence. They liked having them as slaves.

For this to happen – as it repeatedly says in the verses – they **lived among** them.

What effect do you think it had on the Israelites' holiness to live among people who were so evil they were supposed to be wiped out?

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Now let's talk about the spiritual application for us keeping in mind that the promised land is a picture of our rest in Christ...

For the promised land to be the rest that God desired it to be for His people, what did they have to do with the enemies?

They had to remove them. There was no rest for the Israelites, only conflict and turmoil, as long as they allowed them to be part of their lives.

Similarly, for Christ to give us the rest that he desires us to have, we must remove the enemies that we face: the world, the devil, and the flesh. There is no rest for us, only conflict and turmoil, when we allow sin to be part of our lives.

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Our vision for our church, so that we would have spiritual victory versus spiritual defeat, is to be holy, and separate from the world.

Consider these verses...

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

How terrible is it when God speaks this way about the world, but then the world comes into the church?

Israel was influenced by the nations surrounding them, and this is what we see happening today:

- Homosexuality
- Egalitarianism
- The denial not just of gender roles, but denial of the plain teaching of Scripture that God has created us male and female

The real tragedy isn't that these issues are in the world. You don't even make it halfway through Genesis before you see homosexuality and incest, so these sins have always plagued our culture.

The real tragedy is many of these sins find their way into the church.

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The question is how did these churches come to embrace these unbliblical practices and beliefs?

Basically just like we're seeing here in Judges...

They learned them from the world like Israel learned from the nations around them.

They didn't have a biblical vision.

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What we want is to do the opposite of **Judges 2:10**...

We want to **raise up a generation that knows the Lord and the work that He has done** by...

- Faithfully preaching the Gospel
- Faithfully teaching the Word
- Keeping the world out of our church

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Let me conclude by pointing you back to Christ and reminding you of the spiritual rest you have in Him...

Hebrews 4:1 While the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

We can come short of entering the rest you can have in Christ

Hebrews 4:2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest,"" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

So if you're a believer, I want to encourage you to press into the Promised Land and take hold of the rest you have in Christ.

For those who aren't believers, your situation is worse than those in the wilderness:

- You're actually still in Egypt.
- You're still a slave to sin.
- You don't even have victory over the slavery you're in...you're defeated by sin and death.

1 Corinthians 5:7 says Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

When Paul says "our Passover" and sacrificed "for us", who is "our" and who is "us"? Believers!

If you're an unbeliever, you're like those in Egypt who were not covered by the blood of the Lamb. As a result:

- You're still in bondage...
- You've never been redeemed.

If this is you and you've never surrendered your life to Christ, I'll be up front after service and I'd love the opportunity to speak with you! Let's pray.