

F.W. Robertson was a Bible teacher... pastor... New Testament scholar... and a professor for many years at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. ... I have enjoyed a set of his commentaries on the New Testament... which occupy my bookshelf in my office. Robertson lived at the time... when the United States was about to go to war with each other - the American Civil War. ... And Dr. Robertson preached a series of messages in the chapel at Wake Forest... as the build-up of hostility was growing... The sermon text... that he used for his series... was the very book we have been studying here on Sunday mornings... the book of Joshua.

The central theme of the series... was that the issue behind the hostility... was not whose side the Lord is on... (because the North saw God as being on their side... and the South was equally as certain that God sided with them.) ... Robertson preached that the real issue... was whether we are on the Lord's side.

In the sermon that he preached on August 12, 1849... he made this amazing statement... which ties in beautifully with what we'll be looking at this morning in chapter 8:

*"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."*

Joshua would have agreed, because in chapter 8 he allows the Lord to organize the victory out of his mistakes and failures.

The momentum Israel had achieved by the miraculous crossing of the Jordan and the supernatural victory over Jericho was stopped by the defeat at Ai. ... Gloom and despair permeated - not only all those in the camp... but we saw the tormenting anguish in the heart of Joshua. ... The problem was three-fold...1) sin in the camp... 2) prayerlessness... and 3) a failure to get God's direction.

This three-fold problem will bring failure to any ministry... and to any believer. We must deal with all known sin... and we must seek the Lord's enablement in all areas of our life – even those tasks we think that we can handle on our own... without the Lord's help.

From last week... in chapter 7... to this week... in chapter 8... we learn that when we surrender to the Lord and deal with sin in our lives...not trying to hide it... but facing up to it... no defeat is permanent.

No matter what mistakes we may make in our Christian walk... the worst mistake of all... is not to try again. Alexander Whyte... a Scottish theologian... who lived at the same time as F.W. Robertson... wrote... "*the victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings.*"

You start with the Word of God. ... We today don't hear God's audible voice... as people often did in Bible times... but we have the Word of God before us... and the Spirit of God within us. ... God will direct us... when we wait patiently before Him.

The answer to our discouragement and fear... is in *hearing and believing* God's Word. ... (Count on this...) *God never discourages His people from making progress.* ... As long as we obey His commandments... we have

the privilege of claiming His promises. ... God delights to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is devoted toward following Him. ... Look with me... at what 2 Chron. 16:9 affirms...

**2 Chronicles 16:9 (ESV)**

*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.*

You can never exaggerate the importance of the Christian soldier spending time daily in the Word of God. ... Unless daily we take the sword of the Spirit by faith... we go into the battle unarmed... and therefore unprepared. Spiritually minded believers are victorious... because they allow the Word of God to "saturate" their minds and hearts. ... The Spirit using the Word... controls our desires... and our decisions... and this is the secret of victory.

No matter how badly we have failed... we can always get up and begin again. ... Our God is the God of new beginnings. ... This is a great section of Scripture that we are in today!

God's new strategy for Ai...we are about to see... was based on Israel's previous defeat. (Watch for this as we study...) ... God organized victory out of Joshua's mistakes. ... God incorporated Israel's failure... in His strategy... to now bring them victory... because Israel had dealt with the problem God made known to them. ... You see... no matter how difficult a setback sin may bring to you and I... we must renew our efforts to carry out God's will.

I would like to read to you what the Life Application Study Bible has printed at the beginning of our chapter of study today....

Joshua had learned some lessons that we can follow: (1) Confess your sins when God reveals them to you (7:19-21); (2) when you fail, refocus on God, deal with the problem, and move on (7:22-25; 8:1). God wants the cycle of sin, repentance, and forgiveness to strengthen us, not weaken us. The lessons we learn from our failures should make us better able to handle the same situation the second time around. Because God is eager to give us cleansing, forgiveness, and strength, the only way to lose is to give up. We can tell what kind of people we are by what we do on the second and third attempts.

### **Joshua 8:1-2**

With Achan's crime judged... God's favor toward Israel was restored. Joshua needed some inspiration after the great defeat at Ai and after the ordeal with Achan. ... Certainly Joshua would have been depressed and drained of all his energy.

Discouragement over the past... and fear of the future... are the two reactions... that often accompany failure. ... We look back and remember the mistakes that we made... and then we look ahead... and wonder whether there's any future... for a person like us... who failed so foolishly.

The Lord knew that discouragement over the past... and fear of the future... are two reactions that often accompany failure. ... We look back at our mistakes and conclude sometimes, "*I can't do it!*" ... We look ahead at the future and wonder if there is any future for us. ... *What's the use in trying?*

God gives re-assurance... He will never leave us nor forsake us. ... So let me ask at this point, "*Is there any area in your life the Lord is saying, 'Don't be afraid or discouraged?'*" ... If you are afraid... saturate your heart and mind with God's Word. Listen to the Lord and trust Him.

Verse one – “*And the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not fear...”* ... Sin brings fear - not calmness. ... But once sin has been dealt with properly... as is the case here... fear is removed. ... Also verse one adds – “*and do not be dismayed...*” The disaster at Ai had caused much dismay in Joshua about Israel conquering Canaan. ... It made Joshua lose heart and interest in conquering Canaan... but God inspires him... and when God inspires... discouragement is removed.

Seeing how God assured Joshua of success at the end of verse one... makes me ask... What great things would you attempt... if God assured you success? ... If the Lord is leading in your life to do something for Him... big or small... just do it! ... We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. ... God's people... (the Israelites) had been knocked down... but not knocked out. ... If that has happened to you... get back up on your feet. ... Total - true failure - is failure to learn from your mistakes.

Again... verse one... “*Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai...*” ... (LISTEN) ... I am convinced that God always has a plan for His people to follow... and the only way for you and I to have victory... is to obey God's instructions. ... We need to seek the Lord out on His plan... every day. ... We should never try to live a day on our own... thinking... “*This is easy enough... I can figure it all out... I don't need you today, God. I'll call you when I have an emergency...*”

With this instruction... there is also an indirect rebuke. You see... in his first attack on Ai... Joshua followed the advice of his spies... and

overconfidently... used only part of the army. ... Here we read that God's plan was to use "all the people of war."

Now... the last phrase of verse one... "*See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land...*"

"*I have given*" was God's promise... and Joshua's guarantee of victory (...as long as he obeyed the instructions of the Lord.) ... D.L. Moody has been quoted as saying... "God never made a promise that was too good to be true, but every promise must be claimed by faith." ... Unless the promises of God are "mixed with faith" they will accomplish nothing . ... The promises of God make the difference between faith and presumption. ... Because Israel acted presumptuously in their first attack against Ai... they failed miserably.

### **Joshua 8:2 a,b**

God gave the soldiers the right to claim the spoils... but they were to burn the city. ... (You know)... if Achan had waited... only a few days... he could have picked up all the wealth that he wanted. ... *God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.* ... When we run ahead of the Lord... we usually rob ourselves and hurt others.

But when Yahweh's plan is recognized as priority... (You can count on it) He then gives to His people. ... God never seeks to impoverish his people.

It is only as God's people lose sight of His generosity... His provision... His goodness... that the cancer of covetousness will consume our hearts. ...

Indeed this is one of the first principles of 'serpent theology.' You remember the narrative of the Garden of Eden... the tempter was sharp enough to place his emphasis on the restriction God had imposed... rather than on the riches He had lavished. (That narrative is in Genesis chapter 3.) ... Recognizing Yahweh as the giving God... is the prerequisite for yours and my faithfulness. ... Contentment with God's goodness... is our antidote for sinful behavior.

God also instructed Joshua to... "*lay an ambush against the city, behind it...*"

The strategy God gave Joshua for taking Ai was almost opposite the strategy He used at Jericho. ... The Jericho operation involved a week of marches... that were carried on openly... in the daylight. ... The attack on Ai would involve a covert night operation... that prepared the way for the daylight assault. ... The Israelites did not march around the walls of Ai seven times. ... The city's walls did not fall miraculously. ... Israel had to conquer the city through a normal combat operation.

(LISTEN) ... God is not limited to any one method of working. He is not and will not be stereotyped in His operations.

Why does God propose a whole new strategy for Joshua? ... (ANSWER) Because He is a God of infinite variety. ... I happen to think that He changes His strategies on purpose... so that you and I will not relax into depending on habit patterns... on history... on our own personal experience. ... "*Well we've never done it that way before...*" should never be the last word in ministry decision making. ... God's methods frequently

change... and He wants us to always be looking at Him... depending on Him... relying on His promises.... not the methods that we happen to be the most comfortable with...

It's important that we seek God's will *for each undertaking* ... so that we don't depend on past victories as we plan for the future. ... How easy is it for Christian ministries to dig their way into administrative ruts that eventually become graves... simply because the leadership fails to discern whether God wants to do something new for them.

What is true of American business... is also true for the church... "When you're through changing, you're through."

The importance of this for us is that we too always need to check in with the Lord. We have to pray for every new circumstance so that we don't assume that past victories are going to guarantee success for the future. It takes a constant vigil of trying to discern God's plan for our church. ... We want to join Him whenever He wants to do something new in and through us. ... I would ask you to pray for the elders and the deacons here at Living Water... that in all the things we wrestle with... future possibilities... ministry opportunities and resources... ministry challenges... financial matters... facility issues... that we would listen to the Lord more than we listen to each other... and the other members of the body. Pray that we wouldn't trust the past... but would always look to the Lord for future direction.

### **Joshua 8:3-4**

He orders 30,000 men to be sent out at night. ... Joshua's orders meant these soldiers would miss some sleep. ... Please know that you will not



serve God much... if your physical ease has a higher priority than doing your duty. ... It was important that the soldiers stick to their assigned area. ... So it is in Christian service. ... Remain where God has placed you. Stick to your duty. ... and notice the final words of verse 4... “*all of you remain ready...*” That is a great motto for Christian service. – Be ready to serve God at any time.

### **Joshua 8:5-13**

The strategy for the capture of Ai was ingenious. It involved placing an ambush behind (or... to the west of) the city. ... The outworking of this plan involved three contingents of soldiers. ...The first was a group of valiant warriors who were sent by night to hide just west of the city of Ai. ...Their assignment was to rush into the city and burn it... after its defenders had deserted it to pursue Joshua and his army. ... This unit numbered **30,000**.

The second contingent was the main army which walked the 15 miles from Gilgal early the next morning and camped in plain view on the north side of Ai. No doubt this entire force included many thousands of soldiers. Led by Joshua, this army was a diversionary force to decoy the defenders of Ai out of the city.

The third contingent was another ambush numbering 5,000 men who were positioned between Bethel and Ai to cut off the possibility of reinforcements from Bethel aiding the men of Ai. (It was very common for neighboring cities to have a pact with each other... that if one is attacked... the other would come to it's aid... and help them fight.) ... Joshua was in the valley north of Ai... a deep ravine in the hills.

The passage goes into great detail for a small battle, probably to emphasize that success comes only from following the Lord's instructions.

Now... let me acknowledge what may be an indirect lesson of this passage. ... The work of the Lord requires strategy... and Christian leaders must seek the mind of the Lord in their planning. ... Like what we see of Joshua here... we must get the facts and weigh them carefully... as we seek the will of God.

### **Joshua 8:14-17**

The men of Bethel were also involved in the attack... but no details are given. Whether they were already in Ai or arrived on the scene just in time... we aren't told... but their participation... led to the defeat of their city as well as Ai.

It was careless of the people of Ai to leave their city undefended... but such are the follies of self-confidence. ... The pride and overconfidence of Israel led to their defeat. ... Pride... overconfidence... and cockiness... led to the destruction of Ai. ... They made the same mistake as Israel did the first time. ... Ai made the mistake of living in the past. ... Past victories will not guarantee present victories.

Has overconfidence led to defeat or danger in your own life? ... The overconfidence of many Christians has destroyed them... when they thought they could handle the drugs... impure thought life... sex... or liquor. Watch out for cockiness and pride!

### **1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)**

*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

### **Joshua 8:18-23**

The king of Ai had been totally UNAWARE that....

- *Danger was Stalking!*
- *Defeat was Sneaking Up!*
- *Destruction was Sniffing them Out!*
- *Death was Shadowing!*

What a picture of the person without Christ! The unsaved man says, "I don't need Jesus Christ!" Guess what, you do! The unbeliever thinks, "I can get to Heaven my own way!" You can't! Those without Christ do not fully comprehend:

- Where their sin will lead them.
- The deception of Satan's plans.
- The torment and agony of Hell.

Hell is not a place where you want to go to be with friends. There are no friendships in Hell. Hell is a place of darkness, agony, pain, fire, burning, eternal punishment, and isolation from God. The only hope of any person in getting to Heaven is Jesus Christ.

### **Joshua 8:24-25**

Keep in mind that this was not the "slaughter of innocent people" but the judgment of God on an evil society that had long resisted His grace and truth.

### **Joshua 8:26-29**

When at the close of the day the men buried the king of Ai under a heap of stones... there must have been a new sense of faith and courage in Israel. The people saw that not one word of God's promise had failed. The

disgrace and defeat caused by Achan had now been erased. ... After *failure* ... came a *second chance*. ... One defeat or failure... does not signal the end of a believer's usefulness for God. ... But how utterly dependent God's people are upon God's power for any success! ... This is what the text preaches to us.

After the victory of Ai... Joshua did a strange and *militarily foolish* thing. Instead of securing the central sector of the land with further victories... he made them very vulnerable... leading the Israelites on a spiritual pilgrimage... 30 miles north to Shechem. ... Why? ... Simply because Moses... had commanded it. ... Deut. 27:1-8 records Moses instructions that once they get to the Promised Land... they must go to Shechem and worship the Lord there. ... So they did. ... Even though it would make them vulnerable to their enemies once again... Joshua gave immediate obedience. ... Here Joshua challenged the people to renew their covenant vows to the Lord.

### **Joshua 8:30-35**

Today we ourselves have incredibly hectic, demanding lifestyles. The warfare can be very intense for us as God's people here in Central Oregon. I don't know if you ever struggle with this... but worship can sometimes seem a bit irrelevant. ... Yet I hope that one of the things that we see in these verses... is that in the midst of all that we think we must absolutely do... we prioritize worship like this. ... We need to make the same commitment... to spend time together with God's people... worshiping... praying... sitting under the word of God... and affirming who we are and what our relationship with the Lord is.

You would think that after a great victory... Israel would be concerned about the next battles. ... They would have HAD to think about the possibility that the Canaanites might invade their camp at Gilgal... while they were all away worshipping. ... But in light of the risk... Joshua leads the people in worship. ... The great general realized... that it is our spiritual condition... not our military condition... that is the most important. ... And God did protect them.

Real worship often calls us to take risks. ... Is there ever any risk involved in the way you worship...? There is also... often a cost to worship. ...It definitely involves sacrifice. ... If we are not willing to sacrifice for worship... then we should expect to be constantly disappointed in our worship experience.

Are you making progress in your walk with the Lord...? Are you closer to the Lord now... than you were 5 years ago...? ... If not... what has stymied your progress? ... Have you fallen along the way... and refused to get back up...? Is it because of fear and discouragement...? Have you been set back and defeated...?

When we face fear and discouragement... setback and defeat... there is one sure way to secure restoration. ... There is one sure way to be renewed... to gain the victory over being defeated.

It is the rededication of our lives to God... the recommitment or renewal of our covenant with God. ... When we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior... we made a covenant with God. ... We promised to follow and obey Him wholeheartedly. ... By renewing our covenant and promise to follow God —

God will empower us to conquer the enemy. ... There is no enemy that can stand before the believer who has committed himself/herself wholeheartedly into the keeping of God. Victory an comes... no matter how far you have fallen... through rededication... the recommitment of your life to Jesus Christ.