

February 16, 2020 - Dave Stough

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Preacher: Dave Stough

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Can you hear me? Okay, there we go.

We are in Joshua chapter 8, verses 30 to 35. We just observed Israel win two battles, Ai and Jericho, and purify its camp.

And today's passage has Israel taking time away from the battle to remember the Lord. If you're older like me, you probably remember a TV series from the 1970s.

And if you're younger, maybe you've seen repeats, I don't know. There's a series called Kung Fu starring David Carradine. And he was a Chinese-American guy who was out in the West in the late 1800s.

And his character was called Cain. Cain was a very humble person that knew his martial arts very well. And as the story, every episode had him getting picked on somehow.

[1:14] And it seems like the first half of that show, he wouldn't fight. It would be, he had to take time to remember. If you remember the show, he would have flashbacks from his master's teaching when he was young.

And there was no, like, not too much good action in the first half. But it was like he would come out, like the producer was like saying, I can't fight you, I must remember first.

Well, that is what we have here today in Joshua. God is telling his people that it's time to remember. They went up, I wish I had the map, I'll describe it to you. They had to take time to remember what God was saying again.

And what he had done before they continued the battle. So, do you remember already in the previous chapters? It's like remembering is a real important, this is a big lesson from Joshua for all of us, that remembering is just so important to God.

[2:30] The first thing was when they miraculously crossed the Jordan, he told them to go get 12 stones out of the Jordan and build this altar so that they could tell their children what he had done for them when they entered the land.

Then, shortly after that, before they went to conquer Jericho, the captain of the Lord's army appeared. Joshua was a pre-incarnate Christ, I believe. And Joshua fell at his feet, and he said, What would you have me to do, Lord?

And he said, Remove your sandals for the place you're standing is holy. It was like God was saying, Look, I'm going to be with you. The holy God of the universe is going to be with you in your battles. Remember that. Then he had them, after they crossed the Jordan, he had them take the time to remember the Passover. They did the Passover. Something that he had instituted for them as a nation 40 years before that they didn't do in the desert.

And then he said, Okay, now I want you all the men to get circumcised. Oh my gosh. So they had this Passover celebration and circumcision have to do with the nation identifying with him as his covenant people.

[3:46] Then, of course, you remember the altar put up over Achan. Right? It's a reminder that sin in the camp is costly.

And then there was that mound of stones put over the king of Ai. It tells us God is faithful and blesses obedience.

God wanted Israel and wants us to remember that he is holy, remember his promises, and remember what he has already done, and that we are his covenant people when we do battle.

Let's go ahead and read the text. Joshua 8, verse 30. Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel.

As Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded the Israelites, he built it according to what is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones on which no iron tool had been used. [4:52] On it they offered to the Lord burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship or peace offerings. There is in the presence of the Israelites, there in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on stones a copy of the book of the law of Moses.

All the Israelites, with their elders, officials, and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing the Levitical priests who carried it. Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim, and the other half in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel. Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curses, just as it is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women, the children, and the foreigners who lived among them.

If you were looking at a map of Israel, if you can, maybe in your mind picture, there's Jerusalem, and then a little bit above Jerusalem off to, I guess, the east is Jericho, and then above Jericho and just a little west is Ai, and that's where they are in the last chapter.

[6:21] These two mountains, you have to travel. Picture this as the whole nation. There's millions of people now, okay? And this group travels about 30 miles, probably up right next to the Jordan River and the basin, and they kind of come out a little bit to the west, and there's these two mountains in a range, and it's right next to this town called Shechem.

All right, so that place had great significance for the nation of Israel.

It was the place that Abraham went to when he first entered into the land, and he built an altar to the Lord and worshiped him there. Remember, God called him out of the Ur of the Chaldees way back in Genesis 12, and he just went by faith, didn't know where he was going.

But when he got there, he worshiped the Lord in faith. Now his descendants, who are as numerous as the stars, as he promised Abraham, are there worshiping him also.

No doubt this event served as a reminder to Israel of God's faithfulness to them as they pledged their commitment to him when the law was read.

[7:48] So if you notice in the text, the stones, they're stones that are not touched by any tool of man. They're uncut stones. This was commanded by God, and I think that what you're having is a picture of that.

When you go to worship the Lord, you take what God has already given you, and you offer it up. You don't try to improve it or do something to it, but you can't add to it, but you give what God has first given you.

And they sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. Some translations say fellowship offerings on it. So in this valley up there between the two mountains, we have the God of Israel, Yahweh, and you have the nation, and they're connecting.

There is a worship service. It was more than the region of the law. It was first a worship service.

And so what's really going on, like if you kind of look at the big picture?

Well, they just defeated Jericho and Ai, and God is saying, look, the gods of Jericho and Ai are defeated, and Israel is proclaiming that he is the only true God.

[9:03] And his law is going to be the law of the land. That's some pretty good stuff when you think about, it's kind of like a, like in a way like a victory celebration.

So when in the text it says, if you notice that the law was read to the whole assembly, even the foreigners who were with them, and I thought, well, who are the foreigners with them?

And I don't think I can think of, or his Rahab family, but maybe I think, I can't remember for sure, but I think there may have been people coming out of Egypt with them.

But everybody who was a part of this group, the law was read to them, and they took an oath, so to speak, and there was blessings and there was cursings.

Okay, so Israel pledged their obedience. Unfortunately, much of the Old Testament is a record of Israel suffering some of the curses for disobedience.

[10:05] But this ceremony does point something out to us that we need to hear today in the church. And it also, I think, doesn't have something in it that we need also to hear as part of the church.

To be sure that this passage points out to us the importance of remembering and keeping front and center in our minds exactly what God is saying to us, that is definitely a lesson for us.

It is the only way Israel had victory. They had to follow the Lord. Remember, when they deviated a little bit and Achan took the stuff, they suffered defeat.

And it's very apparent that their understanding of and obedience to the Word of God was important. And it's the only thing we can trust to give us victory over sin.

So, it is clear from the text and the preceding chapter that accurately remembering what God has said is of paramount importance. And this is the first point for today's message.

[11:16] I only got two. This is the first one. Remembering God's Word is how we win our battles. Remembering God's Word is how we win our battles.

Of course, we are in a different battle than the nation Israel was. But Joshua shows us how we are to do battle in this life.

Now, Israel entering the promised land is not a picture of us going to heaven as some songs talk about. Heaven is a free gift of God given to those who simply see their need and believe that Jesus died for their sin on the cross.

No, we don't work for it. We don't do battles to enter into heaven. We do, however, learn how to fight God's way in this life.

We are in a battle here. We battle in this life as believers in Christ to walk with the Lord. That is our battle. When we walk with the Lord, we enjoy the spiritual blessing that He has given us just as Israel would enjoy the land.

[12:36] What are those spiritual blessings? Have you guys just taken time to think that through a little bit? I mean, what comes to the top?

Somebody can say something if they want. What comes to the top of your mind when you think of a spiritual blessing? Anything from the Bible is a spiritual blessing that we have that quite possibly Israel didn't?

We don't have the land. They were promised the land. We're promised spiritual blessings. Well, we have the fruits of the Spirit. Right? It's a ministry of God's Word in our heart.

There's the fruits of the Spirit. We have the gifts of the Spirit. There are gifts that are used to edify one another and glorify Christ.

There's a whole array of things when you start looking at it that are all based on the fact that we have a father-son relationship.

[13:36] And when I say son, I am meaning both male and female. We have a father-son relationship based on what God did for us at the cross.

And there are spiritual blessings given to us. We are, when you trust Christ and you get saved, you're placed into his body. You're a part of the living body of Christ.

And he, the baptism of the Spirit, he comes to live within you. That's a spiritual blessing. So, these are things that we do battle to walk in in this day and age.

So, what do we learn from Joshua, though, about how to do battle? When you look at the church, well, I mentioned it's the Word of God, right? But when you look at the church today, in general, in America, it's upsetting to see how much God's Word has been minimized.

Right? I mean, you guys understand, you've seen this a lot. I mean, there's some places where the Bible is just flat-out denied. They go, they sit there and read out of it and everything was just flat-out denied that it's God's Word.

[14:48] That parts of it might be, but it's up to us to accept what we want. And then there's other places where that the Word of God is kind of, there's a few, they believe the Bible is the Word of God, but what happens on Sunday, there's a few verses tucked away here and there that come out in the middle of a program or a show.

And the program or the show goes on at all costs. And then, okay, you have churches that manipulate, this is not Bible-believing churches, that will manipulate the Word of God to make it say something so they could justify greed or some kind of sin.

And still in other places, there's, the Word of God is, maybe it's minimized because there's a person there that had a special revelation. And so they're busy trying to fit what the Bible says to this revelation instead of letting the Word of God speak for itself.

Remember the warning in 2 Timothy chapter 3 about the last days. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.

That would have mostly to do there with false prophets. It goes on to say, it goes on to say, in that passage, from such people, turn away.

[16:26] That's the instruction. Don't have fellowship with people who deny the Lord. This week at work, I had a conversation with a woman that I've talked to on and off over the last probably three years.

And she is, she goes to church and she reads her Bible occasionally. And this week she, well, I also need to say, she also listens to Joel Osteen.

And I had, in a conversation months ago, mentioned to her a video that I've seen on YouTube about him being asked a question by Larry King.

This is an old video. Is Jesus the only way you can have your sins forgiven and go to heaven? Is this like he's interviewed other people and they've told him that and so he's asking him, do you say the same thing?

And Joel Osteen would not say yes. He would not answer that question. He wouldn't say yes or no. He just wouldn't answer the question. Right? And he had a chance to preach the gospel.

[17:44] Okay? He's probably too worried about, this is me conjecture, but it makes sense. He's probably worried about offending somebody so his books sell. He's a good inspirational speaker, right?

So, anyway, I had told this to this lady at work and maybe months or almost a year ago and we were working together again this week and she brought up something she had heard from Joel Osteen and I said, oh, did you ever watch that video?

And she said, no, I didn't. And I said, I thought about that for a few minutes and I said, well, would it bother you if he actually denied the Lord?

She said, well, yes, but, and she basically didn't want to see it because she really liked what he said. People will heap up for themselves teachers.

They have itching ears. They want teachers to scratch, right? So that passage says. It says, in God's word, from such people turn away.

[18:55] Do you think it's important to God for us to remember accurately his word? In today's text, we are given the example to have God's word front and center in our minds when we wage war.

That is, when we just live everyday life walking with the Lord. We are to take seriously the ministry of God's word in our heart, not the mixture of it with the world's wisdom.

Satan does a great work of deception here. I know that many of you know this, but I am stirring you up by way of reminder. Keep on reading the word of God steadily.

You never get too old to do that, right, Frank? He was telling me earlier about his going through the Bible. He has a, he's going through the Bible in a year.

I was like, wow, that's testimony to me, you know. And that's a faithful, but this is essential. Some kind of study and reading and going before the Lord every day is essential to keep your heart from getting hard and being deceived.

[20:12] It can happen to any one of us. we need to hear what God is saying clearly in order for it to have the proper work in our hearts.

It is the word of God that gives faith its substance. What do I mean by that? Well, simply stated, it's the word of God that we have faith in.

You know, the world just says have faith. Well, we need to know what we're having faith in. The word of God is altogether reliable and it's irrevocable.

God's word delves into, it shows us his heart and it shows us our heart. It is reality. everything this world wants you to trust in is merely a distortion of what God says.

It's a, it's like an invitation that distorts it. It's the only thing that we can actually trust 100%. It was the word of God that created everything that we can see and there's things created we can't see.

[21:26] It was his word that created it. It's his word that keeps holding it together. It's God's word as we read in scripture that raised dead men to life.

And it says in John chapter 5 it's God's word that will raise our mortal bodies to life. It says that some, that all, there is a day coming that all who are in the graves will hear the voice of the Son of God and, and rise up some to eternal life and some to eternal condemnation.

It is the word of God that predicted the first coming of Christ and it is the word of God that will be fulfilled when Christ comes again. God's word is, says in Psalms, is settled forever in heaven because the one who gave it is, let's say, sovereignly perfect.

It is the word of God that enlightens the soul to see the true nature of God and of ourselves. It is the word of God that allows us to see the goodness of God that brings us to repentance and experience and experience the love of God.

In our text, Israel is relating to God through the law. The law condemns. The law was given through Moses but grace and truth come through Jesus Christ.

[23:03] This brings me to the second point that I was wanting to bring up today. That is not in our text. Being a child of God frees us from slavery to the demands of the law and gives us the grace to overcome sin.

Grace forgives and restores us to God without the grace of God putting, that God put in us and gave us this father-son relationship.

Relationship we would be like Israel trying to keep the law. The second point I'll say again is being a child of God frees us from slavery to the demands of the law and allows us to overcome sin.

I think that what we have revealed to us in scripture today in this age of grace goes well beyond what Israel had revealed to them about the nature of God.

The law showed many things to Israel but the one thing it did not do was take away their sin and reconcile them to God.

[24:22] We have been reconciled to God because of the blood of Christ. We have been set apart by God so for him to have a personal relationship with him.

Therefore God is free in all of his holiness to come to live inside of us even though we still struggle. He is free to come alongside of us and walk with us daily in a crazy world and in a fallen flesh. His faithfulness to us is based solely on the basis of what Jesus did for us at the cross.

This special father-son relationship is where the miracle of a changed heart in life takes place.

Please remember that when the scripture says son if you are a believer in Christ that is you.

Allow me to read to you again some verses that you may have heard recently at the communion service. But when the right time came God sent his son born of a woman and subject to the law.

[25:56] God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts prompting us to cry out Abba Father.

Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child God has made you his heir. For those who are led by the spirit of God are children of God.

The spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again but rather the spirit you receive brought about your adoption to sonship.

The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are sons of God. Now if we are sons then we are heirs heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

When we approach God in prayer you can be sure that he's delighting in you. Let me pause for a second. Do you I had to go through this mental exercise and maybe it would help you.

[27:12] What do you picture in your mind when you're praying to God? God is a delighted father even if you mess up?

Because he is. That's what he's telling us. He is. God is free to treasure and enjoy you and me as he first intended in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.

Jesus said in John 4 that the father is seeking those to who will worship him in spirit and in truth.

He's seeking those. When the father relates to us through his son in grace, I wish I had this video clip because it says it much better than I can.

But it's like a father taking a violin and playing music and he gives one to his son and he shows him how to play and they play music together.

It's a fellowship. This is what God desires to do. We have a father who delights in us even when we sin. I didn't say he delights in our sins.

[28:45] He still delights in us. And he has provision for you. Now some worry as I have about grace becoming a license to sin.

But when you know God, you realize he is a faithful father who won't let that happen. God's work in our lives is a patient work that often involves the training of discipline and always involves his love. God's love. When it comes to relating to God, this is a question. When it comes to relating to God, you can feel free to answer it.

What do the law and the cross have in common when it comes to relating to God? Think with me for a second. What do they have in common?

I mean, we know the law condemns and the grace forgives, but what do they have in common?

They both point to the holiness of God, do they not? When you come to the cross, you pray, are you not saying, God, I need help?

[30:00] I know you died for me. You're dealing with the issue of sin. You're coming to him in regards to how he has already dealt with that issue.

They didn't have that under the law. Now, you may have an addiction, as I have, sometimes still deal with, that you struggle with and feel too ashamed to even pray when you fail.

Have you ever felt that way? Anytime you or I call upon the Lord, we need to remember that for the Father, the issue of sin has already been dealt with.

This is why he is willing to go with us to places that we don't want to talk about with him. He's willing. He's the only one that can bring you out.

The only one. What he's waiting for from us is to be honest with ourselves so we can be honest with him.

[31:21] We are new creations in Christ. When we embrace how God sees us rather than how we see ourselves, there's a liberation that happens.

We find true joy and we can have this transformation in our hearts that our souls so desperately need. when you embrace God's opinion of yourself, the enemy runs, discouragement leaves, and this opinion, keep in mind, is an opinion of you that has authority.

It's an opinion that is established for all eternity. His is an absolute opinion.

And I believe that for me and maybe for you, growing in the Lord really comes down to how much do I value him and his opinion of me as I walk through this life and this world.

It weeds out, it starts to weed out what other people think of us because it is the absolute opinion. it's what makes us, us. We have to have the word of God and eyes of faith, a heart that wants to know God to walk in this.

[32:52] I pray that this thought is ringing in your ears when you go to pray. And I would ask for your prayers that I can clean the clutter out of my life so I can see this as well.

The Father, because of the Son's sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's power in us, brings us to new heights of experiencing him and the freedom he provides.

He delights in bestowing grace upon us when we come to him because it gives him the glory to win the battle.

He gets the glory. Just like when Jericho fell. Who got the glory? Everybody knew it was something God did. And it's the same when he changes our hearts.

We know and everybody around us knows it's the Lord. And it's on demonstration for all to see. And he delights in you.

[34:01] So the two takeaways from today's message, musicians can come up, they would. Almost forgot about that. The two takeaways today.

Remembering God's word accurately is how we win our battles. number two, being a child of God frees us from the demands of the law and gives us the ability to win the battle of sin in our life.

So let's end our time today. We could stand together and sing to the Lord, you're a good, good father. God