

February 9, 2020 - David Baumgartner

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Preacher: David Baumgartner

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. God is good.

And all the time, He is. It's really good to be here today. The sun is coming out. We're thankful for that. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Joshua chapter 8.

We're continuing our study. We know that Israel's first battle with Jericho was really special, wasn't it? It was their first big battle.

And as such, the spoils were to go to the Lord. And that's because He's to get the first fruits of everything that they do. We also saw this battle of Jericho was a rather unusual battle.

I would say that they don't teach those tactics at West Point or Annapolis. No, they wouldn't know what to do. Everything worked for the Israelites.

[1:04] And as such, they were successful. And here we find now that they immediately made plans to take on their next foe.

Who's that? It's the Amorites, the city of Ai. But this time, Israel lost. And in fact, some of them were killed. So obviously, something went wrong.

Something went wrong. In chapter 7, we find that Israel did not have God's blessing to move forward and to fight the Amorites. And there's a couple reasons that we see for this.

First of all, instead of seeking God's guidance, Joshua followed the advice of the spies. And so he sent in a small number of his army. But certainly, the biggest reason for their failure is because during the battle of Jericho, this man by the name of Achan took the spoils for himself.

He took things that belonged to God. In fact, in verse 1, chapter 7, it says that the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel.

[2:13] Wow. Wow. We don't like that. So God revealed the problem to Joshua, and the guilty person was identified. Boy, as difficult as that must have been, the people of Israel did what was necessary.

And we read that Achan and his family were stoned to death, and then they were burned. Last week's account ended with verse 26. It says that, and they raised, this is over Achan, a great heap of stone that stands to this day.

But it says that the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Well, this morning's passage, God is ready now to bless Israel again and to see them move forward.

And so there's going to be some progress made. There's more battles to fight. And so we're going to be treated here with an exciting battle this morning. Israel will defeat Ai, and then some.

But Joshua, we find that he needs encouragement. We're not told exactly what was going through his head. Perhaps he was fearful. Is God still angry with us?

[3:24] What happens if another guy like Achan emerges in our camp and does something like that? Maybe I, myself, let the Lord down. Maybe if you have thoughts like that, you can relate to what Joshua may have been going through.

Let's read chapter 8. I'm only going to read the first eight verses. And I would like you to notice, starting out here, the Lord's tender words to Joshua.

Let's go ahead and read. Now the Lord said to Joshua, do not fear or be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you and arise and go up to Ai.

See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king.

You shall take only its spoils and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. Set an ambush for the city behind it. So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai.

[4:36] And Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, to send them out at night. And he commanded them, saying, see, you are going to ambush the city from behind it.

Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And it will come about when they come out to meet us at first, that we will flee before them.

And they will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, they are fleeing before us as at first. And so we will flee before them.

And you shall rise from your ambush and take possession of the city. For the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand. Then it will be when you have seized the city, that you shall set the city on fire.

You shall do to it according to the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you. Heavenly Father, we are grateful that we can come here today and worship you, Lord, for who you are, recognizing the great things that you have done for us.

[5:52] Lord, as we read these words, it's hard to imagine what it would have been like, Lord, in some of these texts that we read.

But yet, Father, you are God. And we pray, Father, that these words would come to life to us today. Because we have battles to fight, too. And isn't it a blessed thing that we can say you are good and that you are for us.

Thank you, Father, for all of the promises we find in your word. And as they apply to us, that we can be victorious. Thank you and ask for your blessing that we would understand what you have here.

In the name of Jesus, amen. Boy, you think about this time when I spoke about the Battle of Jericho, we had a nice song, didn't we?

No songs today. No songs about AI, at least that I'm aware of. This text here is fairly long. It's 29 verses in all.

[7:00] And we see that it goes into quite a lot of detail. And we might want to ask, why does it do that? Well, first reason is because there's a lot of complexities involved in all of this regarding the strategy involved here.

But I also believe it's this. It underscores that Israel is going to get it right this time. I believe that. Immediately, we see some contrasts here regarding this battle and then the Battle of Jericho.

This battle is going to be different than the first battle. For one thing, this battle is going to feature conventional warfare. We don't see any priests.

We don't read of them blowing any horns. Instead, the Lord says, take all the people of war with you. And then the second thing, notice in verse 2, there's no ban anymore.

No ban on the spoils. He says, you shall take only its spoils and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. And then the next thing we see is the Lord says, set an ambush behind the city.

[8:08] Boy, that's going to be interesting here. We see here in verses 3 to 8, God allows Joshua to come up with the specifics on how this ambush is going to take place.

For example, in verse 3, notice Joshua chooses 30,000 soldiers. And then he stations them in various places. It appears when you read this that there's three groups of soldiers or warriors.

The first group is going to be this group that's visible right in front of Ai. And there's a second group that's going to be hiding behind the first group. And then there's a third group that's hiding behind the city of Ai itself.

And essentially, what's going to happen here is that the first group who's in front of the city will launch their attack. And then the Amorites, when they come out of the city gates, the first group will turn.

And they will flee as if they're frightened. And this is going to draw out these overconfident Amorites away from the city into this ambush that's been set up by the second group of Israelites.

[9:23] And then at this point, the third group who's hiding behind the city will enter the city. They will set it on fire. And then they will join the rest of the troops in battle.

And by the time the Amorite soldiers turn around and see their city on fire, it's too late. They are surrounded on all sides.

And so we read here that the plans are put into motion. Verse 15, Joshua and all of Israel, it says, pretended to be beaten before them, and they fled the way of the wilderness.

And verse 16, all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua, and they were drawn away from the city. I would say here that this strategy worked.

In fact, if you look at verse 17, it says, So not a man was left in Ai. Isn't that amazing? Not only that, look with me in verse 17. We see that there's some soldiers from another city who get involved with this.

[10:29] Their name is soldiers from Bethel. Boy, of all the names, soldiers from Bethel. It says in verse 17, Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had gone out after Israel.

I think what this means here is that Ai has this neighboring city named Bethel. And apparently these two cities had a treaty for mutual defense.

And so the fighting men of Bethel, they joined with all the soldiers from Ai to fight against Israel. I'm going to ask, why did they do that? Bethel.

Well, perhaps they thought, you know what? We're on the short list of Israel. So we're going to, let's take care of these guys. Let's prevent our own destruction. Oh, that's a bad idea.

I would say instead of hastening their destruction, why don't they negotiate with Joshua? Well, they didn't do that. Verse 17 says, All the men left the city of Ai unguarded and pursued Israel.

[11:38] There's another bad idea. They left the city unguarded. Boy, what a strategy here that Joshua and the Lord had. Verse 17 says that they left it all unguarded.

Verse 18, Then the Lord said to Joshua, Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand. That kind of reminds us of Moses, doesn't it?

He's stretching out his staff. There's that incident at the Red Sea. There's another one with the battle of the Amalekites in Exodus 17. But there we have it. It says in verse 25, All who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000 people.

All of the people of Ai. It says in verse 27, Israel took only the cattle and the spoil of the city as plunder for themselves, according to the word of the Lord that he had commanded Joshua.

This is kind of a sad irony here. If Achan had only waited, he could have had all the spoils that he wanted. Verse 28, It says Joshua burned Ai and made it into a heap forever, a desolation until this day.

[12:55] Verse 29, He hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset, Joshua gave the command that they took his body down from the tree, threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and raised over it a great heap of stones that stands to this day.

Boy, now we've got three groups of stones. We've got in chapter 4, remember the one at Gilgal, where they remembered the crossing of the Jordan River?

And then you've got this one here, this monument over Achan's dead body. And that's for what? Breaking faith. And here now we have our third monument. Verse 29, A monument over the dead king of Ai.

And what would that monument be? It's for second chances, which is really what this is. I could not help, as I prepared for this message, as a father, as a grandfather, I kept thinking of my kids when they would get a spanking.

Yeah, we did. We believed in corporal punishment. Just a little pat on the behind was very useful. But I've got to tell you, as a parent, I'm being recorded here, I guess.

[14:13] As a parent, there is a very tender time after that spanking that the kids realize they've got their attention now.

Isn't that right? Isn't that right? Yeah. It's a tender moment. They know that they've done something wrong. And now there's reconciliation.

There's understanding. And what a wonderful thing to have that experience. And that's what we see here with the children of Israel. They got a big spanking.

They were disciplined. And now the Lord says, it's time to move on. I have forgiven you. Time to move on. What do we take away from this passage here?

The battle of Ai? I think there's a couple things to see. The first thing to know is we are in a different dispensation, right? We are. But the second thing is to notice how this chapter works with the previous one.

[15:17] They work together. And if I would call chapter 7 falling off the horse, I would call this chapter 8 getting back on the horse. Now, I don't own any horses.

I never did. But I'm told that if you fall off your horse, that's what you do, right? You get back on the horse. Or what? You walk home?

I see a couple things here. First of all, the benefits of restoration. Taking possession of the promised land.

It's not a sure thing for Israel, is it? No, it's not. Rather, it depended on their obedience to God himself. This account begins here with Joshua dealing with these lingering effects of this account about Achan's sin.

We saw how Achan's sin affected the whole Israelite community, didn't we? Think about that. People actually died. People that they knew. And then we saw the punishment.

[16:23] Can you imagine how difficult that must have been to stone Achan and his children and his wife? That kid used to mow my lawn.

That daughter there, she used to babysit for us. And now look at them. I'm stoning them. Well, Israel did what was necessary because Achan dishonored God.

That's the truth. And now Israel can move forward. Friends, I praise the Lord that we are in a different dispensation because we don't have to stone each other.

No. Instead, we get to encourage one another. We get to strengthen one another. And that's because God desires restoration, reconciliation.

That's the goal of church discipline. To get us to change our minds when we need to. Not to conform to some man's opinion.

[17:24] But no, to help each other to make our minds conform to God's opinion. And who is right all the time? God is.

So the first thing we see, the benefits of restoration. There's another thing I see here. The blessings of walking in accordance with God.

We might today say walking by faith today. I want to ask you, who are the Amorites today? Are there any? I did a little research on this.

Apparently not. They've been wiped out. But yet in some way, they are here in our culture. They are the unbelievers. Those who will not believe.

Even if a man should rise from the dead, they will not believe. Well, friends, I got a message here. God will not be mocked. He will not.

[18:23] He is the authority. Whether we agree with it or not, whether we believe it or not, whether we like it or not, He is in authority.

And in this passage here, we see that. For instance, we see in this passage the folly of overconfidence of the Amorites.

They were drawn out of the city of Ai and left it completely unattended, defenseless. What do you call that? Folly. You know what folly is today?

It's saying, I don't know if God really exists or not, so I'm going to live as though He doesn't. That's folly.

It is. In our present dispensation of grace, we find that the moment we come to faith and faith in Christ that He paid for our sins at the cross, we are reconciled to God.

[19:25] And what a great truth that is. We would consider that that initial sanctification where we are set apart now. We are gods. We pass from death into life.

His mercies are new every morning. But friends, the blessings don't stop there. As we continue to, we can look to the cross every day.

And that's because God wants us to grow. He wants us to grow in our love for Him. He wants us to grow in our love for each other. That's what He wants. He wants us to mature in our relationship with Him.

To understand Him and His ways even more and more. Those are the things that we see here. sometimes life can seem just like a series of mistakes.

Would you agree with that? Sometimes it does. But, you know, we all make mistakes. The key is to learn what do you do about it. And that's because we have the Lord and we can move on.

[20:30] We can get up on the horse. We can learn more about God. More about what He desires. When we leave this chapter, Israel is back in the saddle.

And they have a role to play just as we've been looking at with these dispensations here. Also, they'll be learning more and more about God. His character.

He's a fierce warrior. Amen? He is. And He has great love and compassion for us. If I could invite the musicians back up here, when things happen like losing a battle, that's when it's time for us to seek the Lord as to why did that happen?

What would you have me do, Lord? Where am I wrong? But it's also a time to remember God deals with us in this dispensation as a father to His children.

we can remember that His mercies are new every day. Is there anybody here whose hope has been dashed by something?

[21:42] Maybe there's something going on, maybe even right now, that you need your hope restored. I'd like to read to you out of a passage of Lamentations. You might just want to jot this verse down.

It's Lamentations chapter 3, verses 21 to 24. Lamentations, that word actually means to cry out loud.

And it's written by Jeremiah. And Jeremiah was writing about Judah's captivity into the Babylonians. But here's the thing.

Jeremiah is able to look back and remember who God is and what God has done. Let me read this for you. Lamentations chapter 3, verse 21.

This I recall to my mind and therefore I have hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because His compassions fail not.

[22:44] They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion. Sayeth my soul. Therefore, I will hope in Him.

Heavenly Father, thank you, Lord, that you are a God of second chances and that in you, Lord, we find reconciliation, we find redemption, we find, Lord, that you have made a way for us to even when we sin, Lord, we could look back at the cross and remember what Jesus did for us.

Thank you, Father, for all that you have done for us and that you continue to do. And, Lord, we are honored that we can be called your ambassadors and that you would have us working in your kingdom work, Lord, involved in sharing your word, making Jesus known to this world.

Thank you, Father. May we walk in the blessings that you have purchased for us and let us be strengthened and that our hope would be renewed that we may serve you another day.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.