

Sermon Outline

“AND THE LORD GAVE THEM REST”:
A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR YOUR GREAT NAME?

(JOSHUA 7:6-9)

I. “Desperately Sick”

- A. Israel had tasted her first defeat in the land of Canaan.
 - 1. The sin of Achan proves that God’s people are still sinners.
 - 2. As sinners, we are easily led away from the Lord.
 - 3. Even laws that seem easy to follow can pose great challenges to us.
—*Have you known people who have fallen into very obvious sins?*
- B. Joshua 7 is one of those moments where God reveals how grave and deep our sinful tendencies lie.
- C. Depending on how proud we are, God could allow us to fall into some very silly sins to show us how wicked we still are.
 - 1. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”
 - 2. Each human being is deeply broken at the core of his or her being.
- D. This truth is something our society desperately needs to hear.
 - 1. It seems that God has brought our nation into a season of national disappointment.
 - 2. High-level people in society are falling down in failure.
 - 3. Suddenly, the myth of our incorruptible society is crumbling before us.
- E. Once we accept the truth of our sinfulness, we are in a better position to receive the Gospel.
 - 1. God sent his Son to the world precisely because we are that bad.
 - 2. We can be honest with God and say: “Lord, I am a sinner, and I live in a land of sinners. Have mercy on me.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). Can you identify with this statement? Can you acknowledge that you are “desperately sick”? What prevents you from doing so? (2) Why does our society need to hear the truth of our desperate sickness? (3) What does acknowledging our sin help us to do?

II. Imprisoned in Sin

- A. Before our Lord Jesus appears, God wants the whole world, including Israel, to know the weight of their sin.

1. Galatians 3:22: “But the Scripture [referring to the Law of God] imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”
 2. Galatians 3:23: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”
- B. In Joshua 7, Israel is in the imprisoning phase of God’s work.
1. God is showing his people that they too are very much like the Canaanites.
 2. God is preparing his people for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Questions for reflection:** How do texts like Galatians 3:22, 23 help us to understand events in Joshua 7?

III. Aftermath (Joshua 7:6)

- A. Returning to Joshua 7, we now come to the aftermath of Israel’s defeat.
- B. We read in verse 6: “Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads.”
1. The Ark of the Lord was God’s throne on earth.
 2. By drawing near the Ark, Joshua and the elders were coming to the only One who could help them—the only One who had the answers for their present problems.
 3. Joshua and the elders also drew near to God with humility. —The tearing of the clothes, the falling to the earth, and the putting of dust on their heads are Middle Eastern expressions of grief and mourning.
- C. We learn two lessons from the actions of Joshua and the elders.
1. *Grief is truly appropriate for God’s people in the event of a national tragedy.*
 - a. We may not mourn in the same way as the Israelites, by tearing our clothes and putting dust on our heads.
 - b. But the spirit of grief should definitely be there.
 - i. When we allow ourselves to grieve, we allow ourselves to be humbled—and therefore, to be saved.
 - ii. James 4:6: “But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”
 2. *God’s people must grieve in a God-centered way.*
 - a. This is clearly illustrated in the example of Joshua and elders.
 - b. The fact that they draw near to God in their grief shows that they continue to trust in God.
 - c. When we are sad, we can be tempted to find our peace in various things, such as food, entertainment, alcohol, or sports.

- d. But we must always return to God.
—Hebrews 4:16: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why is it significant that Joshua and the elders come before the Ark of the Covenant? (2) What two lessons can we learn from Joshua and the elders? (3) When we allow ourselves to grieve, we allow ourselves to be humbled—and therefore to be saved. Do you grieve for your sins? (4) What does it mean to grieve in a God-centered way?

IV. Joshua’s Honesty (Joshua 7:7)

- A. What words do we use when we come before the throne of grace?
 1. Joshua provides us with an exemplary prayer beginning in verse 7:
 - a. “...O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us?...”
 - b. “...Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!”
 2. Notice the honesty of this prayer.
 - a. Joshua does not hide his feelings or his thoughts from God at all.
 - b. He asks God why he brought the people to Canaan so that they could be killed by the Amorites.
—Joshua was almost blaming God for what happened!
 - c. He said in effect that maybe it would have been better for Israel never to have crossed the Jordan in the first place.
- B. Is Joshua beginning to doubt God?
 1. It seems that he is.
 2. Now that Israel has suffered her first defeat, Joshua is beginning to wonder if God loves his people.
 3. Here is a prophet, national leader, and pastor struggling with his own faith.
 4. If Joshua himself had his doubts, why should we expect Christian leaders today be protected from the same?
 5. Joshua 7:7 is a picture of the leaders of God’s people wrestling with doubt and discouragement.
- C. Doubt is a normal part of every Christian’s life.
 1. Perhaps you have doubted...
 - if God really loves you
 - if you are really one of God’s people
 - if you are even doing God wants you to be doing
 - if you are following the right God
 2. The sooner we admit that doubt is part of the Christian life, the better.

- It reminds us of our need for grace.
3. Healthy churches make room for doubts and honest questioning.
 4. We have doubts because we are...
 - a. finite creatures, who don't know all things.
 - b. sinners, who have trouble believing God's Word.
 5. Doubt is really an occasion to seek God.
- D. That is what we see Joshua doing now: He is seeking the Lord, and being very frank with his own feelings and thoughts as well.
- E. Here is what we can learn from this first part of Joshua's prayer.
1. Not only do we learn that doubt is possible for the leaders of God's people.
 2. *We learn that even our doubts have to be taken to God.*
 - a. Just as we grieve in a God-centered way, we are also to doubt in a God-centered way! (As strange as that may sound!)
 - b. God wants to hear about our doubts, our fears, and the struggles that reside in our hearts.
- F. But this is exactly where many Christians make their mistake: They do not take their doubts to God.
1. They take their doubts to their unbelieving friends and teachers.
 2. Instead of strengthening their faith in the Lord, these so-called friends lead the Christian even further from Christ.
 3. Joshua's example must be taken seriously.

—If you have doubts, God wants you to give them to him.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Joshua demonstrate his honesty before God? (2) Joshua shows doubt in God's love to Israel. How is this helpful for us? Is there room for doubt and honest questioning in the Christian life? (3) How does Joshua show us to doubt in a God-centered way? (4) What mistake do many Christians make when they doubt? (5) What doubts do you have now? Have you prayed about them?

V. Israel has Retreated! (Joshua 7:8, 9)

- A. Joshua now presents the problem at hand: "O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies!" (v 8).
- B. Notice that Joshua grieves as the leader of the Israelite nation, not just for himself:
1. "For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround *us* and cut off *our name* from the earth" (v 9).
 2. Joshua fears national extinction.

- C. Joshua demonstrates an important attitude each of us must develop—a sense of corporate unity with the rest of the Nation of God, “the communion of the saints.”
—We should be concerned about the major troubles that plague the rest of the church.
- corruption
 - persecution
 - theological heresy
 - injustice

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Joshua was not only concerned about himself. He grieved for the nation as a whole. What can we learn from his example? (2) How often do you pray or think about the needs of the larger Church?

VI. What Will You Do For Your Great Name?

- A. As patriotic as Joshua was, notice that his concern for Israel is tied to a much larger concern—the glory of God himself.
- B. The final words of Joshua’s prayer—“And what will you do for your great name?”—reflects Israel’s self-understanding at the time.
1. How does Israel see herself?
—Israel sees herself as the special nation that God has chosen to house his Presence.
 2. There is a sense in which God’s reputation is tied to the fate of Israel.
 3. If Israel falls, God’s reputation will fall as well.
—The nations will say that YHWH cannot keep his promise; or that YHWH is not strong enough to save his people.
 4. Therefore, Joshua appeals to God, not just on the basis of Israel’s wellbeing, but also on the basis of God’s glory.
- C. Moses prayed a similar prayer in Exodus 32.
1. When the Israelites committed idolatry, God threatened to destroy the nation (32:10).
 2. Moses rushes to intercede between Israel and God.
 3. Moses made the following case to the Lord:
—If God would destroy Israel, all the nations would think poorly of him (32:11-12).
 4. Moses appealed to God on the basis of God’s interests.
- D. This is how we should continue to pray today.
1. In a relationship between two people, the interests of both parties have to be respected.
 2. The same is true for our relationship with God.
 3. It is true that God cares deeply for us, more than we can even care for ourselves.

4. But too often, we never see beyond this perspective.
5. We must think of God's interests as well.
6. In fact, we should never think of our relationship with God as a relationship between equals.
 - a. God is our King and our heavenly Father.
 - b. Therefore, God's glory is the *ultimate* reason he blesses us!
 - c. Like Joshua, our main concern should always be for the glory of God.
 - d. As we grow in the Christian life, we must see our lives more and more in light of God's glory.
 - e. We begin to pray: "O Lord God, what will you do for your great Name?"

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why does Joshua tie Israel's survival to the glory of God? (2) How is Joshua's prayer similar to Moses' in Exodus 32? (3) God's glory is the ultimate reason for our salvation. Do you accept this? (4) What are God's interests? Do we pray with God's interests in mind?

VII. The Glory of God—the Final Goal of our Salvation

God wants us to reorient our lives and interests around his Name. God wants us to make his glory the main objective and ambition of our lives—even when it comes to our own salvation.

- A. Given that we are self-centered creatures who are focused on our own interests, it takes time to purify ourselves from our self-worship.
- B. The formation of God-centered people is the work of the Holy Spirit.
 1. This is because sin arises from our self-worship.
 2. We sin because we make our desires, ambitions, even our interpretations of life the ultimate factor in our lives.
 3. Often, sin begins with good and normal desires.
 4. But sin shows up when we are not willing to...
 - a. go to God for our final fulfilment
 - b. fulfil those desires in ways that bring glory to God.
 5. God-centered people know that the final answer to all the questions of life is the glory of God.
- C. To start becoming more God-centered people, we pray regularly that God will honor his Name in and through us.

—The *Gloria Patri* prayer is a good start: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) From Joshua's example, we see that God wants us to reorient our lives around his glory. Where are you in this process? How much does God's glory control your motivations in life? (2) Why is the Holy Spirit concerned to make us God-centered people? (3) What small step can we take to become more God-centered people?

VIII. The Glory of God—Received in our Lord Jesus

- A. If God waited for us to come to the point of fully seeking his glory, God will never have his glory fulfilled!
- B. The prayer, "What will you do for your great name?" is answered by God himself in the person of Jesus Christ.
- C. Jesus Christ is the holy Son of God, who has given himself fully to God without reservation, and earns for us the Kingdom.
- D. Because God has already given himself to us, God will make us the holy, God-centered people he wants us to be (1 Thess 5:23).

Let us turn back to our Savior. Let us trust him to make us acceptable to God. With the deep assurance of his love and the perfection of his work for us, let us reorient our lives to what truly matters—the glory of God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Jesus answer the prayer, "What will you do for your great name?" (2) "Because God has already given himself to us, God will make us the holy, God-centered people he wants us to be." What comfort does this truth give? (3) How does the assurance of our Savior's love help us become devoted to the glory of God?