

Sermon Outline

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

THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE MELTED (JOSHUA 7:2-5)

I. Seriously—Do Not Love the World

II. From Jericho to Ai (Joshua 7:2)

- A. 7:2 begins: “Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel...”
- B. Before sending the army into Ai, Joshua sends a reconnaissance team to look at the city.
 - 1. There is nothing unusual at this point.
 - 2. This was the same procedure that Joshua undertook in the case of Jericho.
 - 3. We are not given the impression in this passage that Joshua was somehow disbelieving God by sending in the spies.
 - 4. Joshua was just doing what a good leader would do.
- C. Once again, the men do as they are told: “And the men went up and spied out Ai.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) After conquering Jericho, what does Joshua do? (2) What does Joshua do before sending the large Israelite army to Ai? (3) Do you think Joshua was being untrusting by sending spies to Ai? Why or why not? (4) How do the spies respond to Joshua’s instruction to spy out Ai? What does this say about Israel’s obedience to Joshua?

III. The Easy City (Joshua 7:3)

- A. When the men do return, they had a glowing report.
 - “And they returned to Joshua and said to him, ‘Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few.’”
- B. Apparently, Ai may have been a smaller city than Jericho.
 - Only about two or three thousand men are needed to the battle.
- C. Some interpreters would think that Israel is getting overconfident.
 - 1. But that need not be the case.
 - 2. Israel is confident that the Lord will fight for them again.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do the spies report about Ai? (2) Do you think the spies were overconfident about themselves or simply confident in God's help?

IV. The Defeat of Israel (Joshua 7:4-5)

- A. Joshua takes the advice of his men.
—He sends up only “about three thousand men.”

- B. The soldiers marched to contact with Ai.

- C. But then something goes tragically wrong.
 - 1. Scripture does not give us the details of the battle to us.
 - 2. But in the very next line, we read: “And they fled before the men of Ai”!

- D. We have many questions:
 - Did the Israelite soldiers fall into an ambush?
 - Did the soldiers of Ai have better defenses?
 - Were the soldiers of Ai better trained than the Israelites?

- E. But what God wants us to focus on is this fact that Israel is now retreating from the battle! What in the world is going on?

- F. And then verse 5 gives us more details.
 - 1. “and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent.”
 - 2. We can almost hear the big question on everybody's mind: *How is this possible? Where was the Lord? Why has the Lord abandoned us?*

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Joshua respond to the report of the spies? (2) According to verse 4, how did the Israelites respond to Ai? (3) How would you have reacted if you were part of the Israeli army that day? What thoughts would have gone through your mind when the soldiers of Ai begin pushing you back and killing your fellow soldiers?

V. The Melting of Israel (Joshua 7:5)

- A. This line summarizes the emotional state of Israel:
—“And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.”

- B. When was the last time we heard of melting hearts and broken spirits?
—Joshua 5:1: “As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by

the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, *their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them* because of the people of Israel.”

- C. Even earlier, we heard the same language from Rahab:
 - 1. 2:9: “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that *all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.*”
 - 2. 2:11: “And as soon as we heard it, *our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you,* for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”
- D. Isn’t ironic that it is now Israel’s turn to be afraid?
 - 1. Just as the Lord punished the sins of the nations, so now he punishes the sins of his people.
 - 2. Just as the nations dreaded the God of Israel, so Israel now dreads their own God.
- E. While Israel is God’s chosen nation, God will discipline his people if he has to.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does verse 5 summarize the Israelite reaction to the defeat at Ai? (2) What is so interesting about this response? Where have we seen this response before? (3) “Just as the nations dreaded the God of Israel, so Israel now dreads her own God.” Discuss.

VI. The Father’s Discipline

- A. This is something that God can do even after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. One of the most prominent cases of divine discipline in the New Testament is the case of the couple, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.
 - 1. This couple had agreed to give the proceeds of a sale of their property to the Church (5:1, 2, 4).
 - 2. But they deliberately held back part of the money for themselves—thus breaking their word and lying to the apostles (5:2).
 - 3. God struck them dead in front of the apostle Peter (5:5, 10).
- C. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says that God had been disciplining the Corinthian Church with sickness because members were coming to the Lord’s Table without reverence (11:30).
 - 1. There were divisions in the Church (11:18).
 - 2. People were also using the Lord’s Table as an occasion to eat their own meals and get drunk (11:20, 21).

3. They also ended up disregarding the poorer members of the Church who had nothing to offer (11:22).
4. God brought sickness and death to discipline this Church (11:30).

D. Aside from these occasions, God continues to discipline his people in other ways.

1. God disciplines his people through *discouragement*.
2. God disciplines his people through *defeat*.
 - a. Defeat may include addictions.
 - b. Defeat may include being handed over to our spiritual and earthly enemies (1 Cor 5:5).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How can God discipline the Church in New Testament times? What are two instances of discipline recorded in the New Testament? (2) How else can God discipline his people today? (3) How does discouragement function as a form of discipline? (4) How does defeat function as a form of discipline?

VII. The Lord, Gracious and Merciful

- A. But our heavenly Father is not a petty deity who strikes us down at the slightest sin.
 1. We know from experience that God is patient.
 2. We know from Scripture that God is patient.
 - a. Psalm 145:8: “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”
 - b. Psalm 103:10: God “does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”
- B. God works with us by bearing with us and gently rebuking us.
- C. Why did God punish Israel so quickly and severely in this one instance? —The reason God did so was because he himself had already promised to punish Israel immediately for this type of sin (Josh 6:17-18).
- D. But we must not presume on God’s grace. —God calls us to revere him as our *heavenly* Father.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do we know that God is patient with us? (2) What do Psalm 145 and 103 say about God’s patience and mercy toward us? (3) Why did God punish Israel so quickly and severely for this one sin of Achan’s? (4) We must not presume on God’s mercy and grace. How do we test God’s patience?

VIII. Repentance and Faith Are Also for Christians

Our heavenly Father wants this tragic episode in our Nation's history to move us to a life of constant repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, God wants this episode in the life of Israel to move us toward him.

- A. When we see God punishing his people in ages past, we are to treat these accounts as reminders that God wants to be our supreme joy in life.
- B. Going into the sinful ways of the World will *not* lead to deeper happiness!
- C. When we love the sinful things of the World, or when we use the good things of creation in Worldly ways, our heavenly Father will act to bring us into line.
 - 1. He will convict us of our sins.
 - 2. Sometimes, depending on how resistant we are, the process of discipline can be very painful.
 - 3. Addictions, defeat, discouragement, mental and physical illnesses can fall on Christians and make us as frightened and anxious as unbelievers.
- D. Let us take the hint from the Church of Israel:
 - We need to make sure that we are pressing on in the right direction; onward toward our God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God want us to learn from this tragic episode in Israel's life? (2) "When we see God punishing his people in ages past, we are to treat these accounts as reminders that God wants to be our supreme joy in life." Discuss. (3) What habits of sin are you trapped in at the moment? *Why* do you think your sinful habits will bring happiness?

IX. Saved for God

- A. As important as it is to be motivated by the threat of discipline, Christians can have a new set of motivations for holiness today.
 - 1. We are not the Church under Moses or Joshua. We are the Church under the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Since our Lord Jesus has already died for us and been raised for us, our greatest motivation for holiness should be that we are already holy in Jesus Christ.
- B. Consider Romans 6:11-14: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. *Let not sin therefore reign* in your mortal body...*Do not present your members to sin* as instruments for unrighteousness,

but *present yourselves to God* as those who have been brought from death to life...”

1. Since we are recipients of our Father’s love, we do not have to be addicted to sinful habits of behavior.
2. Why do Christians keep falling back into the same old sins?
 - a. The major reason is that we are not contented with God.
 - b. We are not contented with God because we have not allowed to the truth of God’s love to sink in deeply enough.
 - c. At some level, we still think that God is against us.
 - d. Because of that, we avoid God.
 - e. But when we avoid God, we weaken ourselves, making ourselves more susceptible to sin.

- C. Consider also 1 John 3:1-3: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are....Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*”
1. John is saying something similar to Paul.
 2. Because we hope in God and have the assurance of future glory, we begin purifying ourselves in the present.
 3. Once again, it’s the same logic:
—Because God already loves us, we joyfully purify ourselves for him—not to earn our salvation, but because our overbearing ambition is now holiness! *For the Christian, holiness = happiness!!*

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How can Christians be motivated to holiness? (2) According to Romans 6:11-14, why should Christians present our bodies to God and not to sin? (3) According to 1 John 3:10,3, why should we purify ourselves? (4) Do these verses inspire you to holiness? Does God’s grace inspire you to holiness? Why or why not?

X. Jesus, God’s Solution to Sinful, Melting Hearts

- A. Let us learn from the past.
1. Achan sinned because he was not content with God.
 2. For that, fear came on the hearts of the Church of ancient Israel.
- B. But the Church of today does not have to be that way.
1. We have access to an even greater forgiveness and salvation than Israel had.
 2. Because Jesus has died for our sins, the fatherly love of God comes streaming through to meet us in our brokenness.
- C. Since God really does love us, we really *can* say “no” to sin.

1. We can reject our sinful addictions, without fearing that we would lose out in life in some way.
2. Jesus is the divine Healer of sinful, melting hearts.
3. The Lord Jesus wants to replace our discontent, our fear, and our fear-driven works, deceitfulness, restlessness, and lusts, with *himself*.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the love of God strengthen us to say “no” to sin? (2) What steps can you take to deepen your appreciation of the love of God?