

## Joshua 8:1-29

### “Oh Lord stuck in Ai again”

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#### I. Intro

Chapter seven started with the ominous words, “*But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things*”. But the first words of chapter 8, “*Now the Lord said to Joshua: “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, **go up to Ai**. See, **I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land**.”* How true the words of Paul in Romans 5:20 “*where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*”. What we are about to see is **the Lord bringing about victory where there once was defeat**. Had Credence Clearwater Revival been around at that time the song may have been playing, “*Just about a year ago, I set out on the road seekin' my fame and fortune, lookin' for a pot of gold things got bad, and things got worse, I guess you know the tune Oh, Lord, stuck in Ai again.”*

Nothing my friend’s causes paralysis in our lives more than failure. You know the terrible “*would of, should of, could of’s*” but the Lord tells Joshua and the rest of the nation right after the confession of sin of Achan’s as the accursed things were spread out before the LORD that “**See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.**” *No delay, no hesitation* just I’m giving you **what you think you lost, what you’re certain you don’t deserve**. Failure needn’t paralyze you if you have agreed with God and dealt with the hidden things of your life by hiding them in His love then just as we saw last week there is an immediate

**“Door of hope in the valley of trouble”**. **The victorious Christian isn’t the one that never makes a mistake rather they are the ones that after they fail get up and obey the Lord** as

Paul admonished the Philippians in 3:13-14 *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* To press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ one has to first be willing to **“forget those things which are behind”**.

## II. Vs. 1-13 An opportunity to begin again

Vs. 1-2 Having dealt with sin now the Israelites are ready to deal with defeat. Henry Ford defined a mistake as **“an opportunity to begin again, more intelligently.”** Once the nation of Israel had judged the sin that had defiled their camp, God was free to speak to them in mercy and direct them in their conquest of the land. Warren Wiersbe writes, **“No matter what mistakes we may make, the worst mistake of all is not to try again”**. There seems to be always two reactions that often accompany failure:

### 1. Discouragement over the past

### 2. Fear of the future

We look back and remember the mistakes that we made, and then we look ahead and wonder whether there’s any future for people who fail so foolishly. **Sixty-two times in the scriptures God exhorts us not to fear.** The antidote to both these reactions is the same **start trusting God’s word!** The truth is **God never discourages His people from making progress, even if it is after our failure.** As long as they obey His commandments, we will have the privilege of claiming His promises. Hear the words in 2 Chron. 16:9 where we are told that *“the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is*

*loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore, from now on you shall have wars.*” In Joshua’s first attack upon Ai he heeded the word of his spies and didn’t seek God’s word and only took 3000 men to battle this time he seeks the Lord who tells him to take 30,000.

Vs. 2 Did you notice that God says here that unlike Jericho where all the spoil was to be consecrated to the Lord here he says, *“Its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves.”* **That means that had Achan’s only been patient the spoils of Ai would have been his.** How many times has our **“nearsighted flesh”** caused us to take **what God would have willingly given us had we waited but a short time latter?** **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.** D.L. Moody once said **“God never made a promise that was too good to be true,”** but every promise must be claimed by faith.

Have you ever found it difficult to regain the ground you lost in your life? That is where we are in our text as God is going to deal with the defeat and lost at Ai. When we have failed at some point in our Christian lives, we need to know how to get back on track. Here we are given some keys to regaining victory upon ground where we were defeated:

1. *“Do not be afraid, nor dismayed”:* **They had to receive encouragement from God.**

When we have blown it, stumbled like Israel and Achan in Joshua 7 you have to confess it and then dealt with it and once you have done that **you have to move on.** **What is past is past once you have confessed and repented and beating your self up over it wont change the past and it will paralyze you for the future.** God wanted to use their failure in a way that was included in their victory. God told Joshua to take *“all the people of war with you”*. We need to realize God wasn’t bummed out and He didn’t want the nation to be either. When we refuse to receive God’s grace and forgiveness once we have confessed

and repented we are grieving Him. **There are times we remain defeated Christians not because we haven't dealt with our sin but because we have been unwilling to receive God's forgiveness.** The main reason for this is because we don't "feel" that we deserve it and you know what you don't but who does deserve God's unmerited favor?

Vs. 3-8 Notice the different way the Lord works when one compares Ai to Jericho? The difference between a rut and grave is time and depth! The first time the spies came back with the advice that 3000 men were more than enough this time 30,000 went out and 25,000 of that was the ambush team. Now what this speaks to me is that we ought to never underestimate the enemy. Satan will always bring his "A" game all the more that we ought to heed the council of God in Ephes. 6:11 and, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*"

God delights in accomplishing victory out of our mistakes and often will have us go through failure in order to get us to listen to Him. At Jericho's fall it was a test of faith, Ai's defeat would employ a rare combination of **humility courage and patience**. 25,000 men became part of the decoy and it was this group that would humble out and fake being cowards that Joshua was to lead. This plan also involved patience as they had to wait for Ai to take the bait. The lack of all three of these aspects, **humility, courage and patience** had led to their defeat earlier.

2. The next thing to note with reclaiming ground lost is that: **You have to be willing to obey NOW what you were unwilling to obey previously.** The plan included sending 30,000 men instead of only 3,000 men which suggests that victory will be only in obedience as we give all our resources and attention towards it. The major part of this plan required humility as they were to act as cowards before Ai. They were to act like they did when they were defeated! **The victory won yesterday will not bring the power necessary to**

**have victory in the battles for today. The greatest temptation that occurs after a great victory is the neglect to depend upon the presence and power of God in the present**

**circumstance**. It is only prayer in the hour of victory that makes the child of God realize that unless they maintain continual dependence upon the Spirit of God in prayer their victory will soon turn to defeat.

Vs. 9-13 God instructs Israel to go on the offensive. Our natural tendency is to pull back and defend but that is not the best way to reclaim ground lost. Spiritually speaking the enemy, we face is our old fallen nature which is the very area we need to be on the offensive. Paul said in Romans 13:14 that we are to, “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*”

We are told that the people who were afraid and dismayed that “*Joshua lodged that night amongst the people*”. That is what the body of Christ is called to do when we see those caught in despair after their failure we need to “*lodge amongst them*” to come along side them. Those of us who have failed need to come next to those who have failed to encourage them in Christ the victory is at hand and they will reap the spoils of their past defeat. Leaders need to lead and we do that by being honest and transparent about our past defeats and how God turned those into His victories.

5000 men positioned themselves between Ai and Bethel we are told in verse 9. They camped out between a “*heap of ruins*” and the “*House of God*” sounds like a great place to camp out and wait upon the Lord don’t you think? **It further illustrates that to have victory in the area of defeat we need to make sure our heart is in the right position between:** “*No confidence in ourselves*” and “*complete trust in the Lord*”. It was on this place between these two cites that this

unit of soldiers was to cut off the escape rout of the enemy once they realized that the 25,000 men they pursued outside the city was nothing more than a decoy.

The plan involved more men but it also involved the soldiers acting cowardly like they had prior in their defeat. **If we are to be victorious in areas where we have been badly defeated, we will have to be willing to be humble and transparent.** I can only imagine Joshua going to these 30,000 men and saying, “*Ok fellows here’s the plan I need 5000 of you to lie in wait and 25,000 of you to act like cowards and run and I’ll ne leading the cowards today.*” How humbling it is for you and me to go to the areas of our life where we have been defeated and to do so admitting that we have failed. Ah but remember Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 12:10 “*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*” **The defeat of those 3000 men the first time was do to pride and this time victory would be won through humility!**

### III. Vs. 14-24 Lessons in humility, courage and patience

Vs. 14-20 With the plan set and the soldiers willing to be humbled all that needed to transpire was its execution. The victorious Christian life isn’t going to be achieved by simply knowing the truth it must be obeyed. Far too often we continue to become defeated in the same areas of our lives because we tend to think that because we know something it will come out all right. The Christian life isn’t lived in a test tube and it’s not the right equation on a test paper; no it is the willingness to obey the word of the Lord every day!

It was pride that caused the down fall of the Israelites the first time at Ai and it was pride that cause the defeat of those inhabitants at Ai? I say this because it is relevant to us in spiritual warfare; satan will always try to get us to think that we can do something on our own apart from the Lord but it is this very fact that caused His defeat. Amazing to me that the most frequent

tactic our enemy uses is the one he always fails in as well. *Any doctrine or Christian practice that makes dependence upon God an absolute necessity and at the same time cause me to realize how great and wonderful He is not how important I am is right on the money!* On the day that Jesus died upon the cross I'm certain that satan and the demonic kingdom were certain they had one but it was through the cross that they were forever defeated and we have gained victory through Jesus' sacrifice. Our greatest defeat, our most humbling mistake can and will be the place of the greatest victory if you will only humble your self and allow the Lord to raise you up! Oh that you and I would so be on fire as to set our cities a blaze with the gospel and the smoke would ascend into heaven (verse 20). Isn't it great to see that as the city was on fire that the enemy "*had no power to flee this way or that*"? What a word of encouragement for us to day as Paul reminds us in 2 Cor. 10:4 that "*the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds*".

Vs. 21-24 Restoration is simply returning to fellowship with the Lord after our sin has broken our relationship. The journey from Gilgal to Ai would have been 15 miles up hill and oft times that is about the way it feels to reclaim victory after a defeat. Allan Redpath makes this observation based upon this chapter, "*A life of unbroken victory over sin is the purpose of God for every child of His, however God does not make it impossible for His children to sin instead He makes it possible for them NOT to sin.*"

Some of our wounds are because **God has refused to let you go**. In the midst of your struggle, He's been there holding on to us. You are His child and He wants to protect you and provide for you in every way. Sometimes we foolishly wade into dangerous situations, not knowing what lies ahead. The swimming hole of life is filled with peril - and we forget that the enemy is waiting to attack. That's when the tug-of-war begins and if you have the scars of His love on

your arms, be very, very grateful. He did not and will not ever let you go. Never judge another person's scars, because you don't know how they got them you sometimes they are scars because God loved us enough to not let us go.

#### **IV. Vs. 25-29 Not drawing back your hand**

Vs. 25-29 According to Exodus 17 when Moses was leading the nation he fought the Amalekites at Rephidim. Moses stood over the battle the Israelites prevailed as long as he held up his hands but as soon as they began to drop the Amalekites started to win so Aaron and Hur came alongside Moses to prop up his hand. Though Aaron and Hur propped up Moses' hands it was Joshua that was in the valley of Rephidim fighting the battle. After the battle Moses built an altar to the Lord and named it "The Lord Is My Banner". Many years later and we are told in verse 26 that "*Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.*" We need to keep our hand on the spear and keep it raised before the Lord until the enemy is defeated. Joshua no doubt remembered what it was like on the ground winning and then losing when Moses held up his staff and said man I'm keeping this staff up before the Lord until the enemy has been eliminated. **Keep your knees bent, your heads in the word and your hearts lifted before the Lord until the enemy has been cast into the pit.** Joshua didn't back off, didn't back down but went on the offensive until victory was theirs! The first heap of stones was over the sin of Achan which reminded them of their failure. Here we have a heap of stones over the king of Ai which reminded them of their victory after the defeat.