

## **1.** Joshua 8:1-35 has two events

1. the second battle of Ai vv1-29
2. Covenant renewal at Mount Ebal vv30-35
- 3.

Read Joshua 8:1-35

## **2.** Today we are going to learn

1. How to recover from failure
2. Each step is different
3. God has no grandchildren

## **3.** 1. How to recover from failure

We are talking about moral failure here not just losing the first battle of Ai.

Points to note:

**Punishment was deserved.** A crime against God's word cannot be ignored.

**Sin has consequences** Achan's sin brought disaster on the children of Israel. Our sin will always cause damage to ourselves, our fellows and our witness in the world.

## **Forgiveness is complete**

### **It brings closure on guilt.**

That is spelled out in Romans 8:1 “*There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*”

### **It involves restitution**

We are called to not only repent but act on our repentance and make good on the damage that we have caused. You can read all about that in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

### **It restored relationship**

This is the key point here.

God deals with our sin, completely.

The message here in verse 1 *Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged* is the same message of chapter 1

– ***be strong and of good courage*** because God restores us to mint spiritual condition. The difference is that you are more aware of the consequences of sin.

Failures need to be educational. Israel has learnt a lesson it should not forget. Quoting a commentator called Butler: *The relationship Israel did not regard has been restored by*

*obedience to the divine directions and removal of the contaminating sin from Israel's midst. With the sin no longer in her midst, Yahweh can once more move in her midst without destructive anger. Only as a holy people can Israel have the holy God with her. The relationship restored must not lead to forgetfulness. The example must never leave Israel's memory. Therefore it is memorialized in a geographical name. Every time Israel approaches the Valley of Achor, she remembers the example of Achan and dedicates herself once more to be the holy, obedient people of God.*

**4.** So off they Go to Ai and march round it 13 times and the walls fall down? Why not? That's what God did at Jericho. Don't we just press the right buttons and God acts? NO!

Every battle is different. Ai is the first conventional battle they win in the promised land. Tactically, they use all the known tricks in warfare. Overwhelming numbers (shock and awe); A dawn raid; relying on the men of Ai to assume this is another raiding party; deception; effective communications. We are not told how but Joshua raises his arm and a battle group over a mile away gets a message and

responds. Sandhurst Military Academy probably has it in their training program.

This time God's instructions are different. This is a second trial of their obedience. How would you think about looting after you had seen Aachen and his family executed? They had to trust God to allow looting just as much as they had to trust him in obedience when told not to loot in Jericho. Trust is obeying what God says.

## **5. 2. Each step is different**

This brings us to a second point. God is unchanging but he calls us to trust him by acting differently in different occasions. What God has done in our history is there to remind us that God is faithful. It does not mean God will work the same way again. Ai is different to Jericho. It means obedience to the word of today not the word of yesteryear. Much of the problems in the church in this country come from us wanting God to do it the same way every time. So we end up with beautiful liturgies, rousing hymns, structures that stood the test of time. But not only has the world moved on but so has God. It is remarkable that the largest part of Christendom has an

organisation based on the Roman Imperial Model. The church of England prayer book has prayers that date back to Pope Gregory the first. Much of evangelical church music dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century as that was the flowering of the revival times. These are not wrong, but they tempt us to think that God is old world, for old people and not for today. Churches are disappearing fast leaving medieval structures of great history but no spirituality. Ichabod is written over their doors. The glory has departed. And why? Because we make the mistake of thinking following Jesus is safe and comfortable. But we have to follow Jesus today. Our country is changing. The church is under threat, some churches literally have been threatened. So our comfortable services have to give way to Messy church, different music, more engagement in the community. And who knows how long we will be free to meet like this? House groups may become our only meetings. We do not know what the future will bring but God does. And he moves the church on. Yesterdays miraculous collapse of the walls of Jericho are replaced by the textbook military attack on Ai.

## **5a. The elephant in the room**

I feel I ought to address the elephant in the room here. This makes uncomfortable reading. The promised Land is to be taken by conquest and the annihilation of the people who live there. That does not sound like Jesus to our ears. But we live in a different Covenant. Jesus specifically states that his kingdom is not of this world and therefore his servants do not fight. When Peter waves a sword around, Jesus heals his opponent and stops him doing further damage. The early church had no political or power ambitions. That came when the church got mixed up with power and politics from Constantine onwards. The so-called Holy War referred to as the Crusades failed to address the basic Kingdom principle that the Good News is for all people, Jews and Muslims alike. The battles of the reformation are battles for power where the Good News was confused with the power game being played in Europe. The church has got too close to government and as a result has lost its prophetic edge. So in essence God's kingdom is no longer the nation of Israel but includes all peoples who call on his name in every nation, Israel included.

**6.** Ai is a success because the people of Israel followed what God said for Ai. Joshua clearly uses his tactical skills. And as a result the road is secured deep into the promised Land. But that is not the end of the story. Come back next week and see what Joshua and Israel had to learn next.

We are in a relationship with Jesus. And that relationship must develop or it will become barren and fruitless. This is a call for revival. To seek the kingdom of God and Jesus righteousness, his way for today, that he may use us to win others for his kingdom. To rescue them from darkness and bring them into the light of the glorious Good News of Jesus.

### **6a. Sometimes God works miracles**

As in Jericho, so in South Ruislip although may be not walls falling down!

**6b. More often we are called to be faithful in action.** There is a lot of basic hard slog in the Book of Joshua. The kingdom is not instantaneous, we are not in the business of a make over. This is a renewal movement Jesus

is building a kingdom not made by human hands but by his Spirit.

**6c. We are called to follow Jesus not a rule book.** So while we measure the rightness of our actions alongside the Bible we do not remain in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. We move as the Holy Spirit of God moves, in the direction he calls us.

Which brings us to the second part of today's reading. It may have seemed a strange thing to do but it relates back to instructions given in Deuteronomy 27-28.

This is a strategic step following on from the circumcision I spoke on back in chapter 5. These people were not at Sinai when the first covenant was made. So at the first opportunity they make the covenant their own. The reading referred to is the whole of the Torah, which is the first 5 books of our Bible. Some reading!!

**7.** The point at issue is that God has no grandchildren. Being born in a Christian family is not a qualification for heaven. Each of us has to individually put their faith in Jesus. To turn from sin, receive his forgiveness, accept his

salvation and receive the Holy Spirit. So to with Israel, being born a Jew, and circumcised is not the whole story. They needed to respond to God's grace in accepting the covenant of the Law. And so they had the terms and conditions – the T& Cs read to them. And that included people classifies as aliens. Non- Israelis who had joined them. Even the Old Covenant was not exclusive to the children of Israel. Our Good News is that the New Covenant includes all people of all races and backgrounds who accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord. There is no place in the church for racism or sectarianism. We are all sinners saved by grace.

## **8.** in summary then we have seen

- 1. How to recover from failure**
- 2. Each step is different**
- 3. God has no grandchildren**

And we are called to

**Follow Jesus**

And we do that by

- **Listen to Jesus** sometimes it will be a voice, many times your conscience but also
- **Read his book** even if you find reading hard, it is worth the effort. Begin with

reading the Gospels, and the rest of the New Testament in doses you can cope with.

- **Pray at all times** talk to Jesus