



A FAITHFUL OLD SOLDIER

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1154

Joshua 1:1-2

First Message

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The book of Joshua recounts the story of Israel's entering into the promised land of Canaan and her defeat of thirty-one Canaanite kings. Following the Exodus from Egypt, Israel failed to enter the land by faith. The Israelites wandered around in the wilderness for forty years until an entire generation had passed away. Even Moses was not allowed to enter the land. Joshua, his successor, became the commander-in-chief who would lead the conquest of the land in an amazing seven-year campaign.

When we think of the book of Joshua, we think of battles. Songs like "The Battle Belongs to the Lord" come to mind. We think of the tumbling walls of Jericho and fantasize about conquering kingdoms and tearing down strongholds. It is true that much of the book of Joshua is about warfare, taking on new territory and defeating enemies, but there is another theme in this book, and that theme is worship. Before the warfare begins, in the midst and at the end of the battle there is worship—and, we should note, corporate, never private worship. People assemble and listen as the Word of God is read. They come into the presence of God, watch him work and reflect on what he has done. It is critical that we recognize this theme of worship. That is why I have entitled the series, "Images of Warfare and Worship."

Isn't this what our life in Christ is about? We encounter both elements in life, warfare and worship. We live in tension between these two activities. We cannot and should not try to eliminate one or the other. We should not be fighting all the time, but this is what we try to do. We keep battling and fighting, thinking that when all the wars are fought and all the enemies defeated, then we can enjoy God and worship him. On the other hand, we are foolish if we think we should be free to worship constantly and live free from warfare. Daily, weekly, yearly, we face new fears and new struggles. The book of Joshua, however, teaches that we need to have a rhythm of warfare and worship in life. We experience both elements every day. This is what we should expect, and this is how we should live.

First, we worship. This is the key to warfare. Worship is critical to defeating the enemy. We cannot sustain the battle or succeed in warfare if we do not take time to worship. And then there is warfare. God calls us to engage, to be bold and courageous, to not fear. The faith that is nurtured in worship is engaged in battle. God wants each one of us to enter the fight so that we might exercise faith and trust in the One who promises always

to be with us. God doesn't want us to sit on the sidelines. There is something experienced in the battle that can't be had in worship alone. So, as we will find in our studies in Joshua, life is a combination of warfare and worship.

The book of Joshua heads the second division of the Old Testament, the Prophets. This division includes the historical books (Joshua through 2 Kings, minus Ruth), as well as the books of the writing prophets (Isaiah through Malachi, minus Daniel). Traditional Jewish scholarship distinguishes between the former and the latter prophets. The ministry of the former prophets was to present an interpretative (prophetic) history of God's dealings with his covenant people Israel, from the time of Moses' death until the Babylonian captivity.

The author and date of Joshua is a subject of controversy. According to the Talmud, Joshua wrote his own book. The problem with this viewpoint is that the book records Joshua's death. Some scholars believe that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was the author. Others think that Samuel wrote it. The expression, "until this day," a phrase that is repeated in the text, indicates some lapse of time between the events and the writing. As is the case with the book of Judges, Joshua might have been written during the monarchy. What we can be certain of is that the author certainly compiled stories in a orderly and purposeful way. Furthermore, he was an eyewitness of some of the events he described, because he uses a personal plural pronoun in 5:1 and 5:6. We also know that the author was very familiar with the book of Deuteronomy.

The book of Joshua was written to continue the sacred history of Israel begun in the Pentateuch, in order to keep alive for future generations the memory of the acts of its covenant God. The book reminds God's people that he is fully able to perform, fulfill and accomplish all of his promises. God promised Israel a land, and the book of Joshua establishes the fact that God kept his word.

We can learn much about Joshua even before we encounter him in his book. Let us look at some verses, first, from Deuteronomy, and second, from the book itself:

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew

face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of Israel (Deut. 34:9-12, NASB).

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel" (Joshua 1:1-2).

As we come to our first study on the life of Joshua, I want to consider four dimensions of this man's life and character.

First, let us look at Joshua's training for leadership. Joshua's life prepared him for his role as a leader in Israel, as the following incidents demonstrate. As the son of Nun, he belonged to the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8). He was the "attendant of Moses from his youth" (Num. 11:28). Moses appointed him leader of the Israelite defense against the attack of the Amalekites at Rephidim (Exod. 17:8-16). Joshua served as personal minister to Moses when Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the law (Exod. 24:13; 32:17). Joshua was in attendance when the Lord spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting outside the camp (Exod. 33:11). Joshua learned the value of God's Spirit from Moses when he restrained two men from prophesying (Num. 11:27-29). Joshua was one of the twelve spies who searched out the land while Israel was in the wilderness. He and Caleb stood against the majority in their conviction that they should enter the land (Num. 14:6-9). Caleb and Joshua were spared when the rest of the spies were struck dead (Num. 14:30, 36-38). At the end of the forty years in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb followed the Lord and remained alive at the end of the period (Num. 26:65; 32:12; Deut. 1:34-40).

Joshua was commissioned with Eleazar by Moses to apportion the land for inheritance (Num 34:17). When Moses asked the Lord for a leader and shepherd of Israel to succeed him, God told him to anoint Joshua, "a man in whom is the Spirit," to lay hands on him and to place some of his authority on him. Joshua was commissioned by Moses before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation (Num. 27:15-23). Moses repeated to Israel that Joshua was to be his successor, and Israel was charged to encourage Joshua (Deut. 1:38; 31:3). Moses encouraged Joshua to be strong: "Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings; so the LORD shall do to all the kingdoms into which you are about to cross. Do not fear them, for the LORD your God is the one fighting for you" (Deut. 3:21-28). "Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an

inheritance. And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed'" (Deut. 31:7-8). The Lord himself commissioned Joshua at the tent of meeting in the presence of Moses: "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you" (Deut. 31:14, 23).

Joshua spent years in training under the leadership of Moses. He was a young man when he left Egypt, and he was with Israel for forty years in the wilderness. When Moses died and Joshua was commissioned, Joshua had to be at least seventy years old. Obviously, God took a great deal of time and expended great effort to prepare Joshua as leader of his people. At a time when most men retire, Joshua was prepared to play his most important role.

That is how God's kingdom operates. God's leaders are chiseled and built over a long period of time. They are Mt. Rushmore-like projects; they are Grand Canyons etched out by the constant flow of history. God's leaders are not created quickly; they are not magically produced. God's men and women are the right people for the right time, because God has been involved with them in a long-term discipleship and training program. In our fast-paced, high-tech society this truth can be hard to hear. We are more bedazzled and charmed with people like Bill Gates, not with the Joshuas of the world. We are enamored with 21-year-old sensations. The world hangs on every word that Tiger Woods speaks and every product he endorses. The trend is toward the young and successful.

But things are very different in the kingdom of God. Believers have to be willing to sign up for God's long-term plans for their lives. Are we willing to wait, to submit, to serve? God may want us to be second in charge, or wander around in the wilderness for forty years, waiting on him. It may take time before God's plans for us are clear. Are we willing to be faithful for the long haul?

Second, God does not want his people to have a retirement mentality when it comes to warfare and worship. He does not want us to work hard, get comfortable and coast. This might sound good, but it is a fantasy produced by retirement funds and golf courses. Life will consist of rhythms of warfare and worship all the way to the end. Some of the greatest things that God wants to do with us may occur later in life.

God's old soldiers never retire. Billy Graham is going to be in San Jose in the fall for a crusade. Here is a man who could have retired years ago, but he didn't. He's pressing on, serving God in his great ministry of evangelism. I think of Eli Fangidae in Indonesia. The older this man becomes, the more territory he's willing to take on and the more projects he's dreaming up in his efforts to reach people for Christ. I think of our own Walt McCuiston who has a wonderful ministry in Mol-

dova. Walt supposedly retired a few years ago, but God has him involved in ministry more than ever so that today he's still bearing fruit for the kingdom.

Third, the value of older, faithful soldiers to the body of Christ is immense. The younger generation needs the model, example and wisdom of the older generation, and they in turn need to recognize their value to the young. I work with people in their twenties, and I know that most of them would love to have an older person in their life, a mentor, a shepherd, a friend who could shed some light on their journey, someone who has been through the wars before them, a voice of encouragement. Most young couples and their families would be enriched by having an older couple in their lives with whom they could share their joys and struggles. In an ideal world all of us would have both an older and a younger person in our lives, one to learn from and one to mentor.

A couple of Sundays ago we had a lunch here in the church to honor the volunteers who have been serving so faithfully among us over the years. These are the people who are committed to serving us week in and week out. What a mess we would have on our hands without them! As I looked around the room, I noticed that most of those being honored were of the older generation. God's leaders are trained over a long period of time.

The apostle Paul would agree. His last words were written to his young son Timothy to encourage him to fight the good fight, to be a faithful soldier for the long haul, to pass on to faithful men who would teach others the things that he had learned.

The second dimension of Joshua's background that strikes me is his qualifications. Two phrases that describe these, written prior to the book that bears his name, come to mind. First, Joshua, along with Caleb, "followed the LORD fully" (Num 32:12); and second, he "was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him" (Deut. 34:9).

What qualified Joshua as a leader was not a diploma or a degree, it was godly character. Joshua was a man of God who followed the Lord completely. He sought godly character over world recognition. He was sold out to obeying the God of Israel. Moses was able to pass on his spirit of wisdom when he commissioned Joshua to succeed him. Evidently, there was something more than just a symbolic act taking place when Moses laid his hands upon him. Any man or woman who is considered for leadership should be measured by character and a heart to follow God. And even if you aren't a leader, there is nothing more essential for entering the land than wise character.

I cannot impress upon you enough the importance of this truth. There are so many things competing for our attention, so many opportunities to take advantage of. And it will always be this way. There will be more to do and more to gather and more to achieve than we can

possibly accomplish in one lifetime. The one thing that will help us most on our journey in life is godly character. As we get older, life gets tougher. It gets better, it gets sweeter, but it gets tougher. The issues become more complex, the decisions more gut-wrenching. If you want to be ready to face the battles that will come in your life, then start following the Lord fully now. Get on your knees night and day and beseech him for his spirit of wisdom. As Proverbs says, wisdom is more valuable than gold and silver.

In the paper last week I read a story about students cheating in an advance placement test at Saratoga High School. Recognizing that competition would be intense, some of the best students got hold of a test prior to their exam so that they might move ahead of others in the competition for college placement. Is this the message we're passing on to the next generation, that competition is so hard it's all right to cheat? No, what we should be doing in our communities is pointing out that it is not degrees or diplomas, but character that counts in the end.

The third noteworthy dimension of Joshua's life is his role as a savior. Joshua's original name was Hoshea (salvation), but Moses later changed it to Joshua (Num. 13:8, 16), which means "the LORD is salvation." The root meaning of the word "salvation" is "make wide or make sufficient." This is in contrast to "narrow, restricted, or cause distress." That which is wide connotes freedom from distress and the ability to pursue one's own objectives. To move from distress to safety requires deliverance or salvation.

In Israel's history, salvation came through a leader who acted on God's behalf to bring about salvation. Moses delivered the people from Egypt; Joshua took them into the land and defeated their enemies. After Joshua's death, judges saved and delivered Israel; and after the judges came the kings. Usually, salvation was accomplished not by a mighty army, but solely as a result of the power of God. The leader, the savior was one who trusted in God's salvation and encouraged the people of Israel to do the same. This historical pattern built anticipation for the future Savior who would fulfill the role of a king anointed with God's Spirit.

This is what the prophet Jeremiah was referring to when he wrote these words,

**"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD,
When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell securely;
And this is His name by which He will be called,
The LORD our righteousness." (Jer. 23:5-6)**

In the New Testament, the name Joshua is translated "Jesus" (Acts 7:45, Heb. 4:8). Joshua is a picture of Christ and his saving work for those who follow him. God's purpose at this time was not to teach Christiani-

ty, but to prepare the way for Christ through Israel. According to Isaiah 49:8, the predicted Messiah would be a second Joshua whom God would give as a covenant to the people to establish the land and apportion the desolate heritages.

In Biblical history, three pairs of men stand out: Moses and Joshua; Elijah and Elisha; John the Baptist and Jesus. In each case, the first man would prepare the way for the one who would come after him and save. The message of Joshua is not simply to have a godly character or to see this man of God as an example for us to follow. The message is to look beyond him to see Christ our Savior, the One who delivers us from a narrow and debilitating place. Joshua is a reminder to us of the work of Christ in our lives. We have a Savior, a Redeemer, a faithful Leader whom we can follow into a wide place. Desolation and barrenness have ended. We are brought into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Finally, we note Joshua's role as commander. The Exodus is a picture of salvation from bondage and slavery; the conquest is a picture of the further work of salvation, one that leads to victory, possession and rest. Israel's entering into the land corresponds to our entering into our life in Christ. The end of the conquest is rest. But as we enter into this land there are enemies that must be faced, enemies of the flesh, the world, sin and its idols. All these things seek to stop us from entering into rest. Joshua is a type of Christ who saves, but he is also a conquering commander, the one who leads his people into the promised land, defeats enemies, and gives rest. As Joshua led Israel to victory over the Canaanites, so Jesus fully completes the picture and gives us victory over sin, over the flesh, and over the powers of darkness. This is why the writer of Hebrews says, "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:8-9).

Life consists of warfare and worship. We will have some victories and some defeats. As we open up these pages of Joshua, I want to issue a challenge. This year we are going to war, a war not for the kingdom of earth, but for the kingdom of heaven. A word of caution is necessary: we do not enter into this war to become accepted, loved and approved. When Israel came to the banks of the Jordan, they were already the people of God. God wanted to gift them with a land that was rich beyond their wildest dreams. He had already called them out, now he wanted to take them in.

We are the people of God, having been saved by the marvelous work of Jesus, our Joshua, on the cross. We are loved, we are saved, we are secure in Christ. Nothing can change that. No victory will add to that salvation, no defeat will take it away. However, the faith that has been granted must be engaged and completed in warfare. There are enemies in our land, but they have no right to be there. They might be large and forbidding, but Christ is not only our salvation, he is our conquering commander. I want to invite you into this life of worship and warfare. Together, I want us to possess the land and enter into God's rest.

What are the enemies in your land that are keeping you from that rest? Fear? Discouragement? A troubled marriage? An uncontrollable sin? Oppressive guilt? An addiction that has a stranglehold on your life? Maybe we will have to fight our enemy until the day we die. But God loves us and accepts us and, because of this, he wants us to serve him and walk with him. Write down one or two enemies you would like to battle this year. Joshua defeated thirty-one kings in seven years. We can't take on all the enemies at once, but let us take on one or two. And as we proceed through this book, I invite us to come into worship, to pray together, and to corporately enter into this land as God's people, following the leadership of our Savior and Commander.

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BASIC TRAINING

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 1:1-9

Second Message

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I don't like house painting. If I never touched another paintbrush in my life, that would be fine with me. I hate all the preparation that painting demands—stripping old wallpaper, filling holes, sanding, caulking, taping, moving furniture, laying out drop cloths, deciding on the right colors, shopping and cleaning up. But when the prep work is finished, and it has been done well, painting is a breeze.

Preparation is critical too when as Christians we enter the land and take on the enemies that lie in wait for us as we begin our walk of faith. Preparation for the battles ahead is time consuming and difficult, but it is of the utmost importance to final victory.

Last week when we began our study in Joshua, I challenged us to go to war against one or two strong enemies in our lives. But we must be warned: before we go off slaying dragons, we need to prepare for war. If we are not equipped with the right weapons we will be overmatched. In this book of Joshua, preparation for the battles to come is allotted much more space than the actual battles. So it should be with us. If we prepare ourselves through worship and focusing on God, we will find that the actual battle is not as foreboding as we imagined.

So today and next week we will be going to spiritual “boot camp” for basic training. But there will be no sit-ups, no push-ups and no running in this training camp. Instead, we will concentrate on learning about worship and theology. As we register for camp, we will have to be honest with ourselves, because we will be taking on our deepest fears. We will be learning truths that will help us prepare ourselves for war, truths that can become valuable arrows in our quiver as we engage in battle.

In the Exodus, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, but Israel failed to enter the promised land, wandering instead in the wilderness for forty years. Because he had disobeyed God, Moses himself was prevented from entering the land of Canaan. Following Moses' death, Joshua was named his successor; he would lead the people into the land. Joshua was commissioned for his role by Moses, by Eleazar, and by God himself.

In our last study we talked about Joshua's life and character from the Old Testament prior to the book of Joshua. Today we begin our text. The opening verses feature very important instructions that God gives to Joshua. Chapter 1, verses 1-9:

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying, “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun, will be your territory. No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:1-9, NASB).

Today we will look at five essential truths from these verses. As we will see, the themes we encounter here will be repeated throughout our study of Joshua.

Notice, first, the promise: The land is *given* by God to his people. The word “give” occurs seven times in chapter 1, in verses 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 15. (The same word occurs thirty times in the book of Deuteronomy.) The land, which has vast dimensions and boundaries, was promised repeatedly as an inheritance to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It cannot be taken through believers' own efforts. And it is not given as a reward; it is received only as a gift, and conquered in faith. Moses himself told the people, “Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people” (Deut. 9:6).

Entering into the land is accomplished by two crossings, both of which involve passing through water. The exodus from Egypt was accomplished by crossing the Red Sea; the conquest of Canaan was accomplished by crossing the Jordan. For Christians, the land is our life in Christ. The Spirit-filled life, the gift which was promised, is embraced solely by faith, not works. We don't

deserve this gift and we cannot earn it. We enter through the reality that water baptism represents. We leave Egypt, we are baptized into the death of Christ, we are separated from the world. We enter Canaan, we are baptized into the life of Christ, we become new creations. The place where God dwells, the place where we meet God, is in the land. This is confirmed in the New Testament, where Jesus is described as such a gift by the apostle Paul: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Why is it so important for us to prepare ourselves with this truth as we enter into battle? In the land we are entering into something that God has initiated, and we find there is something he wants us to do. He wants to give us the land. He wants us to enjoy our life in Christ. He wants to give us fruit that our hands have not worked for. He wants to bless us. This is the covenant that he wants to make with us. And not only that, when we enter the land we enter into a relationship with God that is based on gift and total acceptance. We don't enter into the battle so that we can be in a right relationship with God. We enter into battle *because* we are in a right relationship with him.

This truth is primary, because it forms the basis for how we should relate to God. If we relate to him on any other basis, our preparation for battle will not be complete. In fact, this is how we should enter into any covenant relationship—on the basis of gift. Marriage is a covenant relationship. If we don't see our spouse first and foremost as a gift, one to whom we commit loyal love and total acceptance, then the relationship will be skewed. So it is in our relationship with God. This truth forms the whole foundation for entering into our life in Christ.

So as we prepare for war the first thing to remember is that our life in Christ is the gift of God; it is not the result of our own efforts.

There is a second truth we need to know: In the land there will be opposition, but victory is guaranteed.

Even though the land is given to us as a gift, it must be taken in battle. The land must be walked on before it becomes ours. The soles of our feet have to tread on the places that God wants to give us. Therefore, we have to enter the battle. We have to fight. Victory is not automatic. But we can fight with confidence, remembering God's promise to Joshua: "no man will be able to stand before you (to your face) all the days of your life" (v. 5).

Certainly Jesus possessed this sense of confidence when he faced his own torture and death. He knew that victory over Satan, death and darkness was guaranteed. Now we are in Christ and we are following him into battle. We too will face conflict, we will face enemies; there is nothing we can do to avoid them. But God

promises that we will be victorious. Victory may be in the future—it may not seem like victory at the moment—but ultimate victory is guaranteed for those who love God.

This is an essential truth, because it makes a big difference if you know who is going to win when you go out to war. Watching a video tape of a sporting event is very different if you already know who won the game. This is the kind of confidence we can have as we face the battle. "No man can stand before your face"—because you are in Christ.

Here is the third truth: The reason we will be victorious is because God promises to be with us.

That is what God says three times in this chapter, "I will be with you" (vv. 5, 9, 17). He qualifies this further by saying, "I will not fail or abandon you" (to let drop, to let alone). "I will not forsake or leave you" (forsake, depart, let loose) (Ps. 37:25, 33; Ps. 9:10).

This passage is very meaningful for me. A couple of years ago, a situation arose with my daughter when she was away at school that caused me great consternation and anxiety. I was very confused in how to respond. For several days I could not even talk to her. At the time I was studying the book of Joshua, and I came to this word, "I will not fail or abandon you." I discovered that this means, "I won't let you drop," "I won't let go of you." God had given me my answer. I realized that God had never let go of me despite all my wanderings and all my mistakes. I thought to myself, if this is how God treats me, isn't this how I should treat others, especially my own family? I telephoned my daughter that night and told her that although I was still angry about what had happened, I would not let go of her, I would not let her drop. When I shared this with her later, she told me the reason all this had happened was to strengthen my relationship with God! This situation has caused my own heart to be enlarged in its capacity to sense that God loved me, and it has caused me to feel unlimited affections for my daughter just for who she is and not for what she does. The affections that we have shared since that day have made the battle well worth while.

This is the great assurance of Scripture: God with us—Emmanuel. This was the promise God gave to Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Israel, the Servant in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul. It is the last word which Jesus gave to his disciples: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

God does not go on vacation. When we come to him he doesn't say to us, "Can't you see I'm busy?" He never lets us go it alone; he does not let go of us. His loyalty never ends. That is one of his covenant promises. We can take on many foes and encounter many battles if we know that God is with us, for, as Paul pointed out, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The thing that discourages and defeats us is the feeling that we are all alone. This was what so pained our Lord when he was languishing on the cross. This was why he

cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Then, Jesus was separated for the first time from the Father. He could endure the physical pain; it was the separation that caused the deepest wounds. Because of what Jesus endured, God is always with us.

I discovered the truth of this years ago on a Sunday morning when I had to preach in a church in Singapore. Our pastoral staff was visiting countries in the Far East to hold pastors’ conferences, and I was a new staff member. It was arranged for us that we would speak in several churches one Sunday morning, and I ended up speaking at a large church. This preaching business was all new to me and I was very fearful. Not only did I have to preach before a large congregation, but I had to do so through an interpreter. As I awaited my turn to preach, I began to pray. When I looked over the congregation I sensed the presence of God and I felt a great sense of peace. I got so carried away that the pastor had to pass me a note telling me it was time to stop speaking!

No matter what our circumstances, God promises to be with us.

The fourth truth is this: The main encouragement in the land is to be strong and bold.

Four times Joshua is encouraged along these lines. Moses encouraged him thus: “Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed’” (Deut. 31:7-8). The Lord himself commissioned Joshua at the tent of meeting in the presence of Moses and said to him: “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you” (Deut. 31:23). The Lord now encourages Joshua after Moses has died. The words “strong” and “bold” occur three times in Judges 1:6, 7, 9. Also, the two and half tribes that settled beyond the Jordan give Joshua the same encouragement (Judg 1:18).

The words convey parallel ideas, both of which speak of strength. To be strong might be paraphrased, “be a man.” The opposite of being strong and bold is to be fearful and dismayed. Thus God adds the prohibitions, “do not fear” and “do not be dismayed.” The word “fear” here is a very strong term. It means to be so terrified that we tremble. “Dismayed” speaks of brokenness. The word is used of leaders whose courage has been shattered, people who are demoralized and panic-stricken. The assumption is that the only way we are thwarted from taking possession of the land is by our own fear and unbelief. The only way we can be defeated is if we don’t show up. And yet, this very thing, fear, may be the most difficult element for us to conquer.

When Israel went out to battle, Moses instructed the

priest to come near and speak to the people: “Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deut. 20:3-4).

This is a great word for our day, especially for men. We are surrounded by evil and darkness. The danger we face is relentless. It is projected on our television screens; it shouts at us from our computer monitors. At times, sin has such a tight hold on us we feel incapable of defeating its powerful influences. These enemies terrorize, crush and break us. They keep us from taking possession of our life in Christ, the land that God has given to us.

Oftentimes the sin that we struggle with is symptomatic of something that is going on beneath the surface. Our sin tells us that we are not coping with our fears, or that we are trying to relieve the aches and pains of a lonely heart. It takes a great deal of courage to face these deeply entrenched enemies.

Larry Crabb, in his book, *The Silence of Adam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), describes some of the deep fears that men face:

Men who feel powerless like things predictable. They don’t enjoy surprises. The unexpected is a thrilling adventure only when it occurs in areas where an unmanly man feels specially competent...But beneath the confidence of the most gifted man is a fear that won’t diminish. Unmanly men are haunted by the possibility of something happening that they cannot handle, something that requires them to enter unfamiliar territory where their adequacy remains unproven, where their proven talents may be useless. Every honest man feels that fear. An unmanly man feels nothing more strongly than that fear but denies how strong it is within him (p. 44).

What if life exposes me as a failure, someone who cannot handle its legitimate demands? What if I am unable to deal effectively with matters that I must admit are truly important? What if I ruin everything—my family, my friendships, my job—and I am left alone, a loser standing naked for everyone to see? What if I face the fact that all my money, possessions, and good times haven’t filled that awful emptiness deep inside? Unmanly men live with a quiet terror that, like high blood pressure, slowly and silently kills. The terror won’t go away. Usually it remains hidden under the wraps of success, sociability, and routine. Sometimes it erupts. And when it erupts, unmanly men panic or get depressed; sometimes they fell the urge to commit suicide, to kill someone else, or to enjoy the unique pleasures of immorality (p. 47).

Over the years I have seen how needy I am in this area. I become fearful when things get out my control, when something happens to one of my children, when I don’t feel adequate to do what I should. I am afraid to relinquish control or to confront someone with truth. But it is just as fearful to me to tell a parent, a spouse, a daughter or a son that I love them. For years I thought

my problem was low-self esteem. It turns out, however, I am arrogant; I just lack courage.

It takes courage to be honest with our fears and our sense of inadequacy. It takes courage to face an addiction and the reasons behind it. It takes courage to deal with painful resentment in marriage. It takes courage to tell your children that you love them no matter what grade they bring home on their report card. And God tells us be strong and be courageous. But we don't have to do so in our own strength. As Paul writes in Ephesians, we are to "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (Eph 6:10). God is with us, therefore we can be strong and courageous.

Four times in the text God repeats this word of encouragement to Joshua after Moses and the Lord had given him the same word in Deuteronomy. Joshua had already walked with God for seventy years. He had served Moses. He had observed everything that God had done in delivering Israel from Egypt and providing for them in the wilderness. Perhaps Joshua was just like us. Despite all the past victories and the successes he would have in the future, he needed daily encouragement to be strong in the Lord.

We need to arm ourselves with courage as we go to war. God will do the rest.

Here is the final thing we need to know: The main exhortation in the land is to make God's word central in our lives

In verses 5-9 we see repeated the themes we have been talking about. They form an interesting pattern: God is with you; be strong and courageous; keep the law; be strong and courageous, God is with you. The center thought of these verses refers to God's word and its importance as we seek to defeat enemies and take possession of our life in Christ.

Several phrases here relate to God's word: "The law will not depart from your mouth"; we should "meditate on it day and night." These words refer to discipline. The thought here is to know, to study, to think about God's word continually, day and night. To "meditate" is a term that describes a low sound, like the moaning of a dove. In OT times, perhaps the Scripture was read in a low voice during meditation. We should read God's word, and we should speak it, too. If we know God's word, it will be on the tip of our tongue when we need wisdom to respond to a pressure-filled situation. Meditating on the words of God is in contrast to the wicked who meditate on plotting evil day and night.

The goal is to observe to do "according to all that has been written in the law"; "do not turn aside from it to the right or to the left." The thought here is obedience. Will we obey what God says? We don't obey in order to be legalistic or to earn God's approval. We obey because God is God and we are not, because as his people

we are in a covenant relationship with him.

The result of all this is that you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (1:8). "Prosperous" means to accomplish satisfactorily what is intended. "Success" is the thinking that results in wise dealing and use of practical common sense; to have insight or comprehension, wise behavior that conforms one's life to the character of God.

"Prosperity" here is not referring to money, fame or success. Oftentimes obedience to God's word leads to suffering. The promise is that if we obey God's ways we will have what we really want. We will be able to deal with life and we will find that God himself will meet our needs. The reason we don't obey God is because we really don't believe he will give us what we need to survive. Obedience comes out of trust, believing that God will provide for our every need in Christ Jesus. Here is how Psalm 1 describes the man who is blessed: "His delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers" (Psa 1:2-3).

Reading, speaking and obeying God's word is critical to possessing our life in Christ.

This then is how we begin to prepare our minds and hearts and souls for war. These are the truths we need to equip ourselves with. Life in Christ is a gift that God wants us to have. There will be obstacles which must be faced, but no enemy can stand before the Lord. Victory is guaranteed, so be strong and bold, and keep God's word central in your lives.

If we did nothing else other than come to church on Sunday, remind ourselves of these truths and re-center our thoughts, we would go out with renewed strength and hope and assurance. This is worship—filling our minds and hearts with the thoughts of God. We are engaging together as the people of God. We listen. We pray. We respond. This preparation through worship becomes critical for the battles we will face. May God allow each of us to be equipped with these wonderful truths today.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In spite of this I shall be confident. (Psa 27:1-3)

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MORE BASIC TRAINING

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1156

Joshua 1:10-18

Third Message

John Hanneman

June 8th, 1997

When we really want something in life, we spend a lot of time and effort preparing for it. Athletes spend long hours training their bodies and honing their skills. Soldiers put themselves through rigorous training, readying themselves for combat. Years of schooling and preparation are demanded before one can aspire to be a doctor, a lawyer, an architect or an engineer. No matter how much interest, desire and natural inclination we possess, we still have to work hard and extend effort and dedication to reach our goal.

It is no different with the spiritual life. We cannot become spiritual, godly people until we get our priorities in order and are willing to invest time and effort pursuing spirituality. This presents a problem for Christians whose spiritual investments are diminished by the more immediate demands of worldly pursuits.

However, there is a difference between cultivating the spiritual life and educating yourself to become, say, an engineer. Unlike engineering, the spiritual life cannot be captured solely by our own efforts and planning. We can work hard and become a good engineer, but hard work alone will not make us spiritual people. So in the spiritual life we must be involved. But God is involved, too. It is true that we cannot become spiritual without engaging ourselves, but we cannot become spiritual either without God gracing, gifting and working on our behalf.

The spiritual truths that we are learning in the opening chapter of the book of Joshua help us prepare for this spiritual life that we are describing. The foundational principles set out in this chapter form the basic training that helps us enter the "land," which is our life in Christ. In our last study we began to explore these principles. We saw that they highlighted a tension between our own efforts and God's working. On the one hand, the land comes as a gift. It has certain enemies, but no enemy can stand before us, because God is with us. On the other hand, we saw that we have to engage in battle, too. We have to keep the Word of God central to our life and worship, and we have to risk being strong and bold.

Today I want to continue to explore these foundational principles with you. Yes, we are still in a basic training mode, still in spiritual boot camp. Last week, we looked at God's words to Joshua. In today's verses, Joshua gives instructions to all the people (verses 10-11), and then he has a conversation with the two-and-one-half tribes that settled beyond the Jordan (verses

12-18). Some of the themes that we talked about last week are repeated here, themes such as God is with us, and our need to be strong and courageous. This morning, I will highlight three more foundational truths that will help us enter the land.

Joshua chapter 1, verses 10-18:

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, to possess it.'"

And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God gives you rest, and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them, until the Lord gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land, and possess that which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise." And they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you; only may the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be strong and courageous." (Josh. 1:10-18, NASB)

Here is the first truth I want to highlight: The purpose of entering into the land is to possess the land.

"Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 'Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, "Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it'" (vv. 10-11). The word "possess" occurs four times in our text. (The Hebrew word *yarash* is another important covenant term which we find here in chapter 1 of this book.) In military affairs, the word "possess" means to gain control over a certain area by conquering and expelling its inhabitants.

In Israel's history, the root of this word takes on a double force. In order to possess the land the enemy must be dispossessed or driven out. Once that is accomplished, covenant life and responsibility can be engaged in the land.

In the Old Testament, the words dispossessing and possessing were used of physical enemies and physical land. But this always pointed to a deeper reality. For example, Psalm 16 declares: "The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; Thou dost support my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me" (Ps. 16:5-6).

In the New Testament, we see that this inheritance, this possession, is identified with Jesus and all the blessings that are ours when we are in a relationship with him. The apostle Peter says that believers have been "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3-4). Paul says that believers have been "sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13-14).

God wants us to take possession of our life in Christ, but in order to do this we must dispossess the enemies in our land, the enemies of the flesh, the world, and the devil. These foes cannot stand before us because we are in Christ, but we have to cross the Jordan and go to war with them.

Do you have a closet in your home that is an utter mess and you have dreams of making it neat and useful? In order to possess that closet you must dispossess the mess! You have to begin by taking everything out of it, then you have to throw away the junk, vacuum the closet and wash down the walls. Then it is ready to be inhabited. Say you want to plant a field. First, you have to clear the land to make it ready for planting. You have to dispossess the things growing in the ground before you can sow the seed.

So it is with our life in Christ. We want to be more loving people, but in order to possess this quality of love, we must dispossess anger. We want to be more generous people, but in order to possess generosity, we must dispossess greed. We desire to serve in the community, but in order to possess this attribute of servanthood, we must dispossess selfishness.

This truth is extremely important, because it helps us to realize why we have to go to war. It gives us purpose as we face each new day. We are dispossessing the enemies of the flesh, the temptations of the world and the schemes of the devil not as an end in themselves, not to earn our way into heaven, but to possess the life in Christ that is given to us by God.

When we battle controlling bosses, deal with unreasonable parents, face overwhelming fears of rejection,

or wage war against some deep sin in our life, the Lord calls us to battle in order to take possession of our life in Christ. The battle is not about who will get a promotion, which marriage partner will prevail, finding a mate to relieve loneliness, winning a lawsuit, impressing a church board, earning God's approval, or having the perfect career. The battle is about trust, patience, self-control, integrity, honesty and godliness. It is all about facing our fears. Our goal is to possess Christ and let Christ possess us.

If we are not clear on our purpose, then we will get lost. World War II is a time that is remembered with honor and dignity. That war was universally seen as a fight against evil and oppression. There was a clear purpose for the fight, and a decisive outcome. The Vietnam War, on the other hand, was always muddled with confusion. The men who fought there remember that war as a brutal and merciless conflict. But as a nation, we did not have a clear sense of purpose for fighting in Southeast Asia. Our soldiers were confused as to why they were even there. There was not a clear beginning or end to the conflict.

Having a clear purpose is key in any war. So the question that arises is, What will it take to possess the land? Our first thought might be of sharp minds and strong muscles, but not according to the Psalms. Here we receive the great insight that it is not by might or strength that we will possess the land, but by attending to our relationship with God.

Listen to what the psalmist says about possessing the land: "Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land" (Ps. 25:12-13).

Psalm 37 has four references regarding what it takes to possess the land: "For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land" (Ps. 37:9).

"But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity" (Ps. 37:11). Jesus formed the third beatitude from this verse.

"For those blessed by Him will inherit the land; but those cursed by Him will be cut off" (Ps. 37:22).

"The righteous will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever" (Ps. 37:29).

The psalms say that we possess the land by fearing the Lord, waiting on him, being humble, receiving his blessings, and being righteous.

Here is the second truth we learn from these verses: The result of possessing the land is to enter God's rest.

The word "rest" appears in verses 13 and 15. Like the words "give" and "possess," "rest" is a covenant term, a word with deep theological significance. The root speaks of not only the absence of movement, but of being settled in a place; it has overtones of finality, victo-

ry, and salvation. Rest is described by God as “His rest.” It is a place granted by God where there is peace and respite from enemies and the promise of the cessation of sorrow and toil in the future. Rest is a place where Yahweh will “plant” his people, where they will live without fear of being disturbed ever again.

After six days of creation, God rested. He gave the Sabbath as a reminder to us to cease from our work and to wait on him. In Joshua, rest was associated with entering the land and dispossessing enemies. The two-and-one-half tribes had entered into rest, now they were to help the other tribes enter into their rest. In the book of Judges, when enemies were subdued, the land would be said to be “at rest.”

In the New Testament, we discover that that rest is found in Christ. Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). Here is what the writer of Hebrews says about this subject of rest, “For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His” (Heb. 4:8-10).

Isn't this what we are really seeking? We want a home where we are at peace, a secure place where we can feel content and whole. What we are doing is trying to recapture the Garden of Eden. We long for the new heavens and the new earth. But we can enter right now into the rest that is in Christ. He is the place where we stop striving for love and acceptance, stop running from fears and self-hatred and stop trying to satisfy the deep hungers of our souls.

The interesting thing, however, is that we have rest not by escaping war, but by going into battle. We can't remain passive. We can't ignore the threats caused by heartache and addiction. We have to be honest, strong and courageous and willing to face these things. But then we cease from fighting, and we worship. We find rest in Christ, and we look forward to ultimate rest at his coming.

There is a third principle here which involves community: An essential element in possessing the land is for all Israel to fight together.

Verse 2 emphasizes “all this people.” A very important exchange occurs between Joshua and the two-and-one-half tribes that settled east of the Jordan. Joshua reminds these people of the promise they made to Moses to help their brothers when they entered the land.

When Israel defeated Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan, across the Jordan, Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh wanted that land for their inheritance (Numbers 32). Moses was very angry with them for making this request, because he felt that granting this would discourage Israel from entering Canaan (just as when the twelve spies entered the land and ten of them reported the discouraging news that there were giants inhabiting that place). Moses did grant this land as an inheritance, but he made these two-and-one-half tribes promise to enter the land with Israel and fight with them. They would not return until the enemies were defeated. What these tribes were asking for was second best. The lesson is clear: If we want to settle for second best, God will accommodate us.

It was crucial that all Israel enter the land together. Community is a central theme in Joshua. Throughout this book, the community of Israel fights together and worships together. We will see that all Israel crosses the Jordan, all Israel is circumcised, all Israel celebrates the Passover, all Israel walks around Jericho, all Israel suffers when Achan sins, all Israel reads Deuteronomy at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. This points out the truth that all Israel is designed to experience life together in the land.

Community is essential for possessing this life in Christ, and it is essential for going to war against the enemies in the land. But this important element to our warfare is often missing in our day and age. We were never intended to fight this war alone. It is to be waged by the people of God against the enemies of God. There is tremendous fear in being alone, but great encouragement in being together. This is why there is great value in being part of a community where there are real relationships and honest sharing, one in which there is healthy confrontation, supportive encouragement and a commitment to pray for each other. When part of the community is missing or is involved in sin, then the whole suffers. What happens to you affects me; my sin and my struggles affect you. All too often the problem we have in warfare is trying to go it alone. This is what Paul implies in Ephesians when he says that the whole body is growing into a mature man, “being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part” (Eph. 4:16).

Here then are three more truths that will help us prepare for war: The purpose for the war is to possess our life in Christ; the result of possessing the land is to enter into rest; and an honest and healthy community of which we can be a part is essential to our life in Christ.

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RAHAB'S REDEMPTION

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1157

Joshua 2:1-24

Fourth Message

John Hanneman

June 15th, 1997

This Father's Day is a rather sentimental one for me, since my son graduated from high school last week. It's hard to believe that the baby I cuddled in my arms just yesterday, it seems, has graduated from high school and is looking forward to his college years.

Graduations make us want to look to the future, and the speeches that are a part of the process are filled with optimism. Last week, the thought most often expressed by students and teachers alike at my son's graduation was a word to the graduates to have faith in themselves. You can do anything you set your mind to, they were told. All your dreams can come true, they were assured.

As a dreamer myself, I'm not one to discount dreams. However, as I listened to the speeches and heard the philosophy they expounded, I thought to myself, this isn't reality. The sentiments expressed sound attractive, but they are not consistent either with theology or the human condition. Sure, the future can hold great joys and wonderful experiences, but there will be pain, struggles, disappointments and sorrows, too. Graduation dreams will die, because life is hard and suffering is guaranteed.

Listen to the words of the late Henri Nouwen describing his own journey in life:

I have become deeply aware of my own sorrow-filled heart. There was a time when I said: 'Next year I will finally have it together,' or 'When I grow more mature these moments of inner darkness will go,' or 'Age will diminish my emotional needs.' But now I know that my sorrows are mine and will not leave me. In fact, I know they are very old and very deep sorrows, and that no amount of positive thinking or optimism will make them less. The adolescent struggle to find someone to love me is still there; unfulfilled needs for affirmation as a young adult remain alive in me. The deaths of my mother and many family members and friends during my later years cause me continual grief. Beyond all that, I experience deep sorrow that I have not become who I wanted to be, and that the God to whom I have prayed so much has not given me what I have most desired.

Not only must students face the personal struggles expressed by this writer, it is evident that we live in a dark and fearful world. Society is anti-God, anti-people and anti-moral. The world is pro-choice, pro-violence, and pro-self.

So when we think about the future in realistic terms, either as graduates or as senior citizens, is there any hope for optimism, joy and encouragement? The Scriptures answer with a resounding, yes! Life is hard, but out of death comes life, out of sorrow comes joy, and out of unfulfilled dreams can come all that our hearts long for—and the source of this optimism and hope for the future is God and his plan of redemption.

In our studies in the book of Joshua we have seen that Israel's entering into the land following forty years of wilderness wanderings is a picture of the Christian's entering into life and redemption in Jesus Christ. This morning we come to the story of Rahab, from chapter 2 of Joshua. I will read the text and make some observations on it; then I will draw out three spiritual reflections from the narrative.

The story begins with Joshua sending two spies into the land. Joshua 2:1 (NASB):

Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.

As Israel is still preparing to enter Canaan, Joshua sends two spies into the land to check things out. He especially wants to learn about the city of Jericho, which will be his first conquest. This is a good strategic move on Joshua's part. Sending spies into the land is reminiscent of Moses, who sent twelve spies on a similar mission. Only two of those twelve brought back positive news, however; the other ten infected the entire nation with fear, so that Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Why only two spies this time? Joshua had learned a lesson. When you have the right two, two are all you need.

Verses 2-7:

And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it came about when it was time to shut the gate, at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

The two men come to the house of Rahab, who is reported to be a "harlot." This is confirmed by James in his epistle. Perhaps she was also an innkeeper. Literally, the text says that the spies "lay down" there. They did not go there because they were looking for a harlot. I rather think they came to Rahab's establishment because they wanted to remain incognito on their assignment. We learn later that Rahab lived on the city wall of Jericho, so her house was a base of speedy escape.

The king of Jericho learned of the presence of the spies and sent to Rahab for the men. In response, Rahab lied and sent the king's men on a wild goose chase. With her reputation, it is remarkable that the men did not search the house. Perhaps they were clients themselves, or they feared whom they might find there.

Some would say that Rahab's deception was unethical, and that God was validating this kind of action. Theologians explain this dilemma is several ways. The question is, Was Rahab right in deceiving her own people? I would say that her deception was perfectly valid. After all, this was war, and in war, deception is part of the game. Warring parties know this. In baseball, we have the squeeze play; in football, the fake field goal or the fake punt. Teams understand that deception is part of the game. So it is with war. A modern day illustration of this principle would be the actions of Corrie Ten Boom in hiding Jews in Nazi-controlled Holland.

Verses 8-11:

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

After the king's men have departed and the city gate is shut, Rahab goes up to the roof and talks to the two spies. Essentially, her question to them is this: "Where have you been? We have been waiting forty years for you to come and defeat us." She knows that God has given Israel the land, that the terror of Israel has fallen on them, and that the people have melted away. She tells the spies that they had heard how God dried up the Red Sea and that Israel had defeated the two kings of the Amorites. She reveals that there was no spirit left among the Canaanites. They were a defeated people before the battle had even begun. That is why she finds it hard to understand why it had taken so long for Israel to enter Canaan. Further, she confesses that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of all creation.

Next, Rahab requests salvation from these men for herself and her family.

Verses 12-16:

"Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." So the men said to her, "Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

Then she let them down by a rope through the win-

dow, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. And she said to them, "Go to the hill country, lest the pursuers happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days, until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way."

Rahab has dealt kindly with the two spies, now she asks them to deal kindly with her and her entire household. The words "deal kindly" are the key covenant word, *hesed*, the word which God uses in covenant relationships with man. The men agree to her request, and she lets them escape, using a rope to lower them down the city wall, much like Paul escaped to safety in Damascus.

Verses 17-21 magnify the agreement made between Rahab and the spies:

And the men said to her, "We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household. And it shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear." And she said, "According to your words, so be it." So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

In these verses, their conversation is magnified in flashback fashion, because the author wants to fill in some important details. The men tell Rahab that there are three conditions to their oath. If any one of them is violated, then they will not have any blood upon their heads. The first condition is that Rahab tie a scarlet thread on the window; the second is that only those who are in her house will be spared; the third is that she cannot relate any of this business to anyone. Rahab agrees to the conditions, and instantly ties a scarlet thread on the window.

Verses 22-24:

And they departed and came to the hill country, and remained there for three days until the pursuers returned. Now the pursuers had sought them all along the road, but had not found them. Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us."

The two spies escape to the hill country for three days to avoid capture; then they cross back over the Jordan, no easy task, and report to Joshua: "The LORD has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us."

I will now draw three spiritual principles from these verses. The first one is this: The enemies in our land are absolutely terrified and are already defeated.

The land has been given to us by God and no enemy can

stand before us because we are in Christ. We have already discussed this theme. What is added in the story of Rahab is news of the utter despair that resides in the hearts of the enemy.

Four words in the text point out this truth. The first word is “terror”: “The terror of you has fallen upon us” (9). The word means dread, fear, horror. David gives an image of this kind of dread in Psalm 55:4-5:

**My heart is in anguish within me,
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me;
And horror has overwhelmed me.**

Did you know that the enemies you are so fearful of are in terror of you?

The second word, “melted away,” is found in verse 9: “The people of the land have melted away” (9, 24). The word has the idea of both trembling and dissolving. It describes the panic-stricken condition that God’s judgment causes in the hearts of his enemy.

The Old Testament has many examples of this word: “The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord” (Ps. 97:5); “He raises his voice and the earth melts” (Ps. 46:6); “God touches the land and it melts” (Amos 9:5).

The word in verse 11, “our hearts melted,” is a different term from the one in verse 9, but it has the same meaning. Some outside force causes the “melting,” which is physical and emotional distress. This word is used in other places in the Old Testament: “In the presence of God, the mountains dissolve” (Nah. 1:5); and when David faced the fear of death, he wrote: “My heart is like wax; it is melted within me” (Ps. 22:14).

The fourth word is “courage”: “No courage remained in any man any longer” (v. 11). Literally, “no spirit arose in any man.” They had given up; they were beaten; there was no fight left in them.

Exodus 15:13-16 combines all these words for “melt” and “terror” to describe Israel’s future victory in the land:

**In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people
whom Thou hast redeemed;
In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy
habitation.
The peoples have heard, they tremble;
Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.
Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them;
All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.
Terror and dread fall upon them;
By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as
stone;
Until Thy people pass over, O LORD,
Until Thy people pass over whom Thou hast pur-
chased.**

All of creation melts and trembles in the presence of God—and so do God’s enemies and ours. They are fearful and despairing, defeated and demoralized as we enter into our life in Christ. They know the power of God and they know that he is with us. When the demons encountered Jesus, they were in dread of him. They knew who he was and what they were up against. They had no hope for victory; all they wanted to do was survive.

But this is not our experience, is it? Usually, we are the ones who feel defeated and fearful. We are demoralized, we live in terror, we have no spirit of courage within us. We do not feel we can stand toe to toe and have at it with the things that torment us. As a result, we do not enter the land. We choose instead to wander in the wilderness year after year. But our enemies are more afraid of us than we can imagine. They are saying, “Where are you? Why don’t you come and put an end to us? Don’t you know how powerful your God is?” The reason we don’t experience victory over our enemies is because we don’t show up for the battle. We would rather cower in our foxholes.

How many times in your life have you put off doing something you were afraid of doing? Perhaps it involved a conversation you knew would be difficult, an addiction you thought you could not live without, a Bible study you were afraid to teach, a secret you thought you couldn’t share. You didn’t think you had what it takes. But then you finally got up the nerve and risked, and it wasn’t nearly as hard as you imagined. You sensed that God was with you, and you thought to yourself, “Why did I wait so long?”

We all have enemies, fears, doubts, moods, attitudes and dark areas of sin that paralyze us, control us and hinder our freedom in Christ. They may appear to be deeply entrenched, alarmingly powerful and woefully controlling, but they quake in the presence of God. This is why we are encouraged, along with Joshua, to be strong and bold. Not only is God with us, our enemies are shaking in their boots in fear of us.

Here is my second principle: In a dark world about to be judged, there remains a way of salvation.

Our world is on the brink of judgment. Listen to what Henri Nouwen says about this: “I see parentless children roaming the streets of Sao Paulo like packs of wolves. I see young boys and girls being sold as prostitutes in Bangkok. I see the emaciated prisoners of war in the camps of former Yugoslavia. I see the naked bodies of people in Ethiopia and Somalia wandering aimlessly in the eroded desert. I see millions of lonely, starving faces all over the world, and large piles of the dead bodies of people killed in cruel wars and ethnic conflicts.”

We cannot save the world from destruction. And we cannot save creation, which is awaiting eagerly the revelation of the new heavens and the new earth. But in the midst of a society about to be judged, like Jericho and Canaan, there is a way of salvation, because even now, God is in the process of saving people.

Rahab is a wonderful picture of this salvation. Israel was about to enter the promised land under the mighty right hand of God, and Jericho was about to be destroyed. Rahab had been a prostitute, a victim of a sin-drenched society, but she was about to experience the same salvation as Israel.

How did Rahab gain this salvation? First, she confessed her faith in Yahweh as the one and true God, the God of heaven and earth. Second, she recognized that her deliverance would come only through loyal love, and she appealed to this loyal love, a pledge of truth and faithfulness, from the two spies. Third, she acted decisively to tie a scarlet cord on her window. The cord was the sign that would keep her and her house safe when judgment came. Imme-

diately we are reminded of the Passover. Then, the red blood of the lamb splashed on the doorposts of the Israelites became a sign so that all the first-born of Israel were saved when God visited Egypt with the plague of death. Rahab would find refuge in the house marked by the sign of the blood of the lamb. She believed, and indicated her belief by immediately obeying what she was told to do. She did not delay one day or three days or a week. She tied the red cord on her window at once. She burned all her bridges with a world that was about to be judged and placed her hope on God's loyal love.

Salvation comes for all who take refuge in the cross, in the blood of the Lamb. We can be saved from the terror and judgment of the Lord, before whom all of creation trembles and all enemies melt. It makes no difference where we live, who we are, or what we have done. We must make our appeal to God's loyal love, the only basis by which we may be delivered, and by which we enter into a relationship with him. We align ourselves with God's people and make evil and sin our enemies. We no longer are friends with the world; we become God's friends. We burn our bridges with the world and sell out completely to immediate obedience.

The postscript for Rahab is that she is listed in the "hall of fame" of faith in Hebrews 11. In James 2, she is held up as a model of a faith that works. This is our hope as we face the future in a dark and evil world.

The third principle is this: When we are bold and strong to fight the enemies in our lives we become agents of God's loyal love, pronouncing salvation to the lost.

As we look upon our dark and depraved world it is easy for us to become discouraged, critical and judgmental. We can try to fix things by controlling the institutions of power, protecting ourselves from all outside influences or removing ourselves completely and hiding away. Jesus did none of these things. He was the agent of God's love, pronouncing salvation to people like Rahab: to a woman who anointed his feet with tears, to another woman at a well in Samaria, to a woman caught in adultery, a tax collector sitting in a tree, a man with a demon. In the midst of a world going to hell, Jesus came to be an agent of God's loyal love.

All too often we are so consumed with fear as we face our enemies that we are not aware of people like Rahab who are caught in darkness but long to be set free. All too often we wander in the wilderness year after year when we should be agents of God's love to people trapped in sin but desperate to be loved. There are people waiting for us to tell them the good news so that they can be delivered from judgment. Rahab waited for forty years for someone to bring her salvation. Who has been waiting for you to tell them of God's marvelous redemption? Perhaps a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member. Perhaps it is someone with long hair or strange clothes or a marginal occupation, but they are waiting to hear about the love of God.

About five years ago, a young man named David who was not a believer began coming to our singles group and spending time with one of our Christian sisters. I was concerned about this, so when he asked me to play a round of golf with him, I agreed. On the golf course, however, I was more concerned about how I was playing than I was about my long-haired friend. At the end of that summer he told me he had something to say to me. I thought to myself, "Oh no, they're engaged!" Then he told me he had become a Christian. I was thrilled. David now has a wonderful wife and is a vital part of our community. I always tell him that God must love him a lot. As I think about this text this morning, I think about this young man who was ready for salvation, because God had prepared the way for him.

The world has many Rahabs and Davids waiting to be saved. May God give us the courage to enter the land. May he give us eyes to see those who are caged by the darkness but want desperately to be set free.

As I reflected on graduation last week, I wondered what the future holds for my son. It is easy for me to become fearful. I know the enemies facing him are real. The optimistic thoughts expressed and felt through the graduation ceremonies last week won't be enough to carry him through. It is not just a matter of will power, determination or heroism. But I also know that God can be with him and that his enemies are terrified of this God. There is a way of salvation and redemption. That is why I have a real sense of hope and optimism as he takes on new territory and enters into the land.

May God's salvation and power be the source of hope and optimism for ourselves and for our children.

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THE CROSSING

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 3:1-17

Fifth Message

John Hanneman

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Every one of us has to make significant crossings in life, times when we enter a new dimension of being, living and relating. We enter some of these changes gladly, but we have to be forced, kicking and screaming, into others.

We make an early crossing when we leave elementary school for junior high school. From there we cross to high school, and at last to college. After graduation, we leave the world of education and enter the job market. Leaving the singles world and getting married is a very significant crossing; and from there we make the crossing that leads to bearing children and raising a family. When we move from one company to another or to one city to another, we cross over into different surroundings and circumstances. When we lose a parent, a spouse or a child, we cross over into a season of mourning and loss. At some point, of course, we must all face the prospect of our own death, crossing over from this life to the world that lies beyond. These crossings can be fearful times, because we do not know what lies ahead.

The most significant crossing in life comes in the spiritual realm, when we leave the natural world and cross over into the supernatural world. We leave a life of sin and enter into a life of holiness. We leave a life of selfishness and enter into a life of service. We leave the darkness of the world and enter into the light of heaven. We leave a life of being dead in our trespasses and sins and enter into the life of Christ.

Chapter 3 of Joshua recounts a most significant crossing for the nation of Israel, a physical crossing that had deep spiritual implications for them. In fact, the word "cross" occurs twenty-two times in chapters 3 and 4 of Joshua. Forty years earlier, Israel had left Egypt only to wander in the wilderness for a generation. Now at last, the nation was about to cross over from the wilderness to a land flowing with milk and honey, the gift that had been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To accomplish this, the entire nation had to cross from one side of the Jordan to the other, a task of immense proportions.

Chapter 3 of Joshua, to which we come this morning, relates how this crossing was accomplished. We will read the text, make some comments on it, and then draw some spiritual applications from it. Verse 1:

Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and he and all the sons of Israel set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, and they lodged there before they

crossed (NASB).

Shittim was the place where Israel was camped when the spies were sent out from the camp. They returned and gave the report, "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us." Joshua responded immediately to this report. He "rose early in the morning" and brought the sons of Israel to the banks of the Jordan river.

Verses 2-4:

And it came about at the end of three days that the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before."

The nation passed three days at edge of the Jordan. The time was early in April, approximately the same time of year that Moses led the people across the Red Sea, and the river was swollen. As the nation waited, God impressed upon them the impossibility of the task ahead. They, of course, were wondering how in the world could such a vast number of people cross over the Jordan.

In verse 3, the ark of the covenant is mentioned for the first time in Joshua. The ark, which will play a central role in these chapters, was a gold plated box, four feet by two feet by two feet, which housed the tablets of the commandments. It was a symbol of the presence of God. Later, it would be taken into battle so that Israel would know that God was with his people.

They were instructed to follow the ark, which was to be carried by the Levites, but at a distance of about two thousand cubits (about a thousand yards). God was making it clear that he was leading the nation; he wanted everyone to see that. The total total number of people who gathered to cross has been estimated at about two million. The census listed the number of men twenty years and older alone at more than six hundred thousand.

Now, before they set out, Joshua addresses the people and the priests. Verses 5-6:

Then Joshua said to the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” And Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, “Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over ahead of the people.” So they took up the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people.

Joshua commands the people to “consecrate themselves.” The word means to sanctify, to make holy. This would have involved such things as washing clothes (Exod. 19:10) and abstaining from sex (Exod. 19:15). Purity was a requirement before they entered into the land.

The reason for this was that they had to prepare their hearts for the wonders, or wonderful things, which God would do in their sight. “Wonders” refers to miracles like the ones God performed on Israel’s behalf in Egypt. These are acts that are beyond man’s capabilities, and hence, unsolvable or inaccessible to man. God’s wonderful acts are beyond man’s capacity to duplicate or fully understand. In the Psalms, the wonders of God are subjects for praise and thanksgiving. They are to be declared and revered—and not just in a private musing, but in a public sharing of what God has done.

Spiritual preparation was required before God would act; and purity was necessary to fully appreciate the wonders that only God could do. Israel was about to witness a holy moment.

Now the Lord speaks to Joshua. Verses 7-8:

Now the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you. You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the ark of the covenant, saying, ‘When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.’”

God tells Joshua that he will be exalted just like Moses, and reaffirms to him that he will be with him, just as he was with Moses. So both Moses and Joshua shared the experience of leading the nation of Israel across a body of water in a miraculous way. Finally, God gives instructions for the priests to stand in the Jordan while the entire nation crosses over into the land.

Next, Joshua speaks to the sons of Israel. Verses 9-13:

Then Joshua said to the sons of Israel, “Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God.” And Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will assuredly dispossess from before you the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Hivite, the Perizzite, the Girgashite, the Amorite, and the Jebusite. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan. Now then, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe. And it shall come about when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the wa-

ters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above shall stand in one heap.”

Joshua tells the people what will happen before the fact, saying that when the very soles of the priests’ feet touch the water, the water would stand in “one heap.” This wonder would occur for two reasons. First, so that the people of Israel would know that the Living God, the God of all the earth, was with them. (These phrases describing the sovereign God stand in contrast to the local pagan dieties who died and came to life again with the changing of the seasons.) And second, the parting of the Jordan would encourage the people’s faith; it would be an indication that their God would dispossess all the enemies in the land to which they were now crossing over. Seven nations are listed, a number indicating completeness, so it would be a complete conquest. And it would be God, not Israel, who would dispossess these nations.

Twelve men, one for each tribe, are commissioned to carry stones into the Jordan to provide a firm footing in the muddy river for the priests carrying the ark. The fact that the water would stand in “one heap” would show that God and not some natural cause was responsible for the waters being cut off.

Finally, after all the years of wandering, the people begin crossing the Jordan. Verses 14-17:

So it came about when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, and when those who carried the ark came into the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), that the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

As the people obediently approach the river, the priests dip their own feet in the water. The only thing that was required was faith. Immediately, the river was cut off at Adam, a city about seventeen miles upstream from Jericho. Thus, a wide stretch of the river bottom was exposed so that the whole nation could cross. The waters flowing into the Dead Sea, probably tributaries which emptied into the river between Adam and the Dead Sea, were also cut off. The ark of the covenant was stationed in the middle of the river bed until the entire nation crossed over so that every person could see the ark as they crossed. The fact that landslides dammed the Jordan river in 1267 and in 1906, and that an earth-

quake on July 11, 1927 dammed the meandering stream for almost twenty-four hours, gives credibility to this account. Nonetheless, what happened here on this occasion of Israel's crossing was a wonder of God.

Now that we have read the story, I want to draw four spiritual applications for our lives from this amazing account. The first thing I will say is this: The greatest wonder of God is our salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we have already seen, for Christians, Israel's entering into the land represents our entering into our life in Christ. And crossing the Jordan is a picture of our salvation and baptism into this new life that is ours by faith. We leave behind Egypt and the wilderness, the world system, a life based on money, power and success, a life of chaos and sin, and we cross through the water and are united into the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The thing that the text highlights so beautifully is that we cannot cross over into this salvation unless God does a miracle, a wonder. Certainly we cannot cross over through our own efforts. We can't take ourselves out of death and into life. There is no bridge, no boat. God leads us to the edge of the water, and then he makes it possible for us to cross. The only thing we contribute is a small amount of faith: We put the soles of our feet in the water; God does all the rest. If we talk about what we have done to make our life in God possible, or try to explain what makes it feasible, we diminish God's wonder, because it is not fully accessible; it is beyond our reach. God wants us to watch, to marvel and participate.

The supreme wonder that makes our salvation possible is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just like Israel waited years to cross into the land, so the world had waited for a Messiah. Just as Israel waited three days at the banks of the Jordan, so the world waited three days for the resurrection of Jesus. The question was, would there be a way of salvation? Could God do it? Or would a death bring an end to God's plan of redemption? Would we be doomed to die in the wilderness? But, just like God exalted Moses and Joshua, so he exalted his only Son and lifted him to a place at his right hand. God gave him a name that is above every name, and subjected all things under his feet. This is a wonder. And just as Jesus was exalted, we are exalted with him. As Paul says in Ephesians, we have been made alive with Christ, raised with him and seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:5-6). Miracle of miracles!

Consider your own salvation this morning. Forget about everything that has gone right or wrong, all your possessions, all your plans, and stand at the Jordan and consider what God has done. Is that a wonder to you? Does it thrill you? Does it give you goose-bumps? As I reflected on this truth, I remembered that it was twenty-five years ago last month that I crossed over the Jordan.

I was tramping around in the wilderness and I was in trouble. But God led me to the shore, parted the waters for me, and I walked across on dry ground. I still can't fully understand how or why. It is a wonder to me.

Maybe you have not made that crossing yet. You are standing at the edge and you are fearful. You don't know what will happen. I invite you to cross over. All you have to do is put the sole of your foot in the water. Believe in the resurrection. God will do the rest. Ask Jesus to come into your life and enter into the land.

As he meditated on the wondrous events of that day, the psalmist wrote:

**They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region;
They did not find a way to an inhabited city,
They were hungry and thirsty;
Their soul fainted within them.
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble;
He delivered them out of their distresses.
He led them also by a straight way,
To go to an inhabited city.
Let them give thanks to the LORD for His loving-kindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men.
For He has satisfied the thirsty soul,
And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good (Ps. 107:4-9).**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and our salvation are wonders.

Here is the second point of application: As we enter into our life in Christ, God continues to do wonders.

Even after we have crossed over into our life in Christ we continue to face major crossings, times when everything changes. We cross over into new jobs, new neighborhoods, new cities, new demands, and God calls on us to take on new territory and defeat new enemies. We are fearful, but as we enter the land and live the life of faith, God continues to do wonderful things in our midst.

What strikes me about the text is how God leads us. He puts us in situations which are impossible unless he acts. God loves cliff-hangers. He loves bottom of the ninth, two-out rallies. He savors fourth quarter come-backs, winning with no time left on the clock. He brings us to the edge and then tells us to wait. We are anxious, but he waits until the impossibility of our circumstances is impressed upon us.

And notice that God leads by going way out in front. The image of God's leading, symbolized by the ark of the covenant, is marvelous. As God leads his people he wants to make it obvious that he is the one doing the leading. Furthermore, he wants a little distance between himself and us so that it is clear that he is working and we are not. He doesn't want us to run ahead of him. Parents will know what I am talking about. If you have taken your children on a hike, even if it's only to the shopping mall, you know that they are forever running

ahead of you. You have to tell them to wait for you, to not go around that corner until you get there first. This is what God has to do with us. We are always ready to take the lead, to run on ahead even though we have no idea where he is taking us. Paul has a word for us here, from his second Corinthian letter: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels in order that the surpassing greatness of the power may be from God and not from ourselves." If we are too close and too involved, we might become confused as to who is doing what. But God wants to make it obvious. He commands the waters and they cease to flow. Our life in Christ is often contrary to nature, so we need to let God lead.

I believe that God is going to do some great new things in our midst this year, and it is important for us to enter together, to let God lead, to not run ahead of him. That is how God leads his church, and how he leads us in our crossings, when we leave one thing behind and embark on a new season. So let us allow him to lead so that we can see his wonders at work among us, and let us content ourselves with being his faithful followers.

Here is the third point of application: God's wonders give us confidence of his presence and his power to dispossess our enemies.

God wants to do wonderful things in our midst to give us confidence that he is with us and that he will continue to be with us. These become powerful memories that will help us trust him at the next crossing. When we cross over into the land, we will face difficult times. Things will not always turn out the way we want. Enemies have to be defeated. Fearful situations have to be faced. Jebusites, Hivites—even termites—lie in wait for us! We will be tempted to trust in ourselves or to serve idols, but God wants us to dispossess our enemies and possess our life in Christ.

Every time I face an impossible task, an overwhelming enemy or a paralyzing fear, it always seems like the first time. I forget my history and everything that God has already done. I need to stop and recall that God has already done amazing things in my life. He has been faithful day in and day out. He has saved me from frustration and futility. He has caused me to cross over into new spheres of freedom and grace. He has given me wonderful victories over enemies. And so, if he has already done so much, I can be confident that he will be my help in the situations that I have to face. It will be possible to defeat the powerful enemies of sin and darkness and fear. As the Scripture declares, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Here is the final principle: The preparation for God's wonders is holiness; the response to God's wonders is

praise.

Once again, the theme of worship surfaces in the book of Joshua. Preparing for the crossing is crucial. We must consecrate ourselves, for God is going to do wonders. This is a picture of our responsibility. We must make ourselves holy, purifying our hearts. Rather than trying to build a bridge or figure out some other way to get from here to there, before we cross and before we go to war we have to take time to meditate, pray, to be quiet and cease striving. Our hearts must be clear so that we can see where God is leading. We have not gone this way before. We must focus our eyes so that we will not miss God's wonders. James tells us that the wisdom from above is "pure" (James 3:17). Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

Our response to God's working should be praise and thanksgiving. Worship prepares our hearts and allows us to express our joy and amazement. Our praise is based not what we have done, but on what God has done. And this response is to always be public. When God does something miraculous, it is wrong to keep it hidden. Let us build memorials, write poems, frame pictures.

Next month, my wife and I are heading off to Timor, in Indonesia, to participate in a ministry with Eli Fangidae. We have gone through a long process trying to determine what God wants from us. I was fearful of taking her on a twelve-hour plane ride, to a very hot climate. When Eli heard that Liz was coming with me, he said they could hold the first women's conference ever on Timor! Ever since we made the decision to go, life has been bizarre, difficult and depressing. How will be able to do this? It is tempting to get our game plan all figured out, to forget about God's leading and rush ahead with our own ideas. But God has been reminding us that the first thing we have to do is worship him, to purify our hearts in preparation for the crossing ahead.

So in this beautiful story from the book of Joshua, we learn, as the children of Israel did on that great day when they put their feet into the Jordan and began the crossing that would take them into the promised land, that God wants us to worship him, to purify our hearts, to keep our eyes fixed upon his leading, and watch for his wonderful works which encourage us to face with faith the crossings in our own lives.

**Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who alone works wonders.
And blessed be His glorious name forever;
And may the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen, and Amen (Ps. 72:18-19).**

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THE MEMORY

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1159

Joshua 4:1-24

Sixth Message

John Hanneman

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Several of you have told me how significant these words from the book of Joshua, “be strong and bold, God is with you; He will not fail you or forsake you,” have become to you. In fact, this verse could well be displayed on a banner in front of the podium. In the land, there are enemies, but God is with us; that is why we are encouraged to be strong and bold.

One thing that can help us do this is the memories we have of what God did in bringing us into the land and defeating enemies. Memories are a powerful force that connect us to the past and help shape our future. As the popular song says, memories “light the color of our minds.”

Our emotions are closely connected to our memories. Some memories, of course, we hold very dear. Whenever we gather with family and friends, these are the things we speak of as we recall joy-filled times from the past. Other memories, unfortunately, are not so pleasant. While we try not to think about those, even unpleasant memories are important.

Even more important than the events of our lives in the past is the way we remember them. I have vivid memories of returning home from the hospital after I learned that my mother had cancer and did not have long to live. Every square inch of that home where I grew up carried a memory for me. As I walked through the house, my mind was flooded with hundreds of events and conversations past.

Memories are very powerful: Grade school field trips, our first home run, our third grade birthday party, our first romance, the times we got in trouble and were punished, the time when someone who was dear to us died. Just about everyone who was alive at the time can recall vividly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news of the assassination of President Kennedy, or when the first astronaut walked on the moon.

We build national memorials so that we can remember great people and historic events: Memorials to World Wars I and II, memorials to great presidents, memorials to courage and discovery, memorials to historic moments. Bruce Waltke says: “Memory plays an important role in any society. Without a memory a person loses identity, and without a history to sustain it a society and the world around it become virtually phantom. Any society that hopes to endure must become, as sociologists put it, ‘a community of memory and hope.’”

In our text today from the book of Joshua we will find that memories are extremely important to our spiritual history and our sense of community. Last week, we looked at Israel’s historic crossing of the Jordan; today, in chapter 4, we will talk about memories of that great day. Joshua 4:1-24:

Now it came about when all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, and command them, saying, ‘Take up for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet are standing firm, and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging place where you will lodge tonight.’” So Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe; and Joshua said to them, “Cross again to the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel. Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ then you shall say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.”

And thus the sons of Israel did, as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the LORD spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place, and put them down there. Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day. For the priests who carried the ark were standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. And the people hurried and crossed; and it came about when all the people had finished crossing, that the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed before the people. And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over in battle array before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them; about 40,000, equipped for war, crossed for battle before the Lord to the desert plains of Jericho. On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; so that they revered him, just as they had revered Moses all the days of his life.

Now the LORD said to Joshua, “Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan.” So Joshua commanded the priests, saying, “Come up from the Jordan.” And it came about when the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet were lifted up to

the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks as before.

Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the sons of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' then you shall inform your children, saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever."
(NASB)

The first thing we see in this chapter is that life in Christ, both for the community of Israel and for believers in Christ, is to be experienced in community.

We have seen this truth already. Here once again the "all Israel" motif is dominant in this chapter as an entire nation experiences both the crossing and the memory together. For example: "all the nation had finished crossing" (1); twelve men are selected, one from each tribe (2); twelve men again are mentioned, one from each tribe (4); twelve stones are lifted up, according to the number of tribes of the sons of Israel (5); stones are lifted up, according to the number of tribes of the sons of Israel (8); the two and a half tribes that wanted to settle east of the Jordan cross in front of the sons of Israel (12); Joshua became great in the eyes of all of Israel (14).

Notice that the number twelve is repeated five times in the first eight verses. This draws attention to the fact that each tribe is represented; no one is left out. In the story of Joshua, the nation of Israel is seen as one people, one community. They enter the land together, they fight together, worship together, and experience salvation history together.

In the New Testament, there is one new man in Christ, one body of Jews and Greeks, slave and free, male and female. This indicates that Christians are part of something much bigger than themselves. Our salvation is experienced in community. What happens to one happens to all. Unless we have a real sense of community, our life in Christ is diminished, our joy and hope is cut short. In the land, there is great strength drawn from community. This is what people are longing for today. They long to connect, to be accepted and loved, to be given the chance to be themselves. That is how the church is to function. Our own church, especially, is to be such a place.

The second thing that is obvious in this chapter is that God guides and leads his people. He is present with us in everything we do. Once again we see the prominence of God's presence, symbolized by the central role of the ark of the covenant: "Cross again to the ark of Yahweh your God in the midst of the Jordan" (5); "Because the waters were cut off from before the ark of the covenant of the LORD" (7); Joshua established the twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, under the standing place of the feet of the priest carrying the ark of the covenant (9); the priests carrying the ark of the covenant were standing in the

midst of the Jordan until all the things were finished which Yahweh commanded (10); it was when all the people finished crossing over that the ark of Yahweh and the priest crossed over before the people; "command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony that they come up from the Jordan" (16); it was when the priests carrying the ark of the covenant of Yahweh had come up from the midst of the Jordan that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place (18).

The ark of the covenant symbolized the presence of God among his people—God leading his people. Last week, we saw that God was out in front of the nation of Israel, showing them the way as they crossed the Jordan. Here in chapter 4, we see that God remained in the midst of the danger while the people hurried across the river bed. God took the place of greatest uncertainty. He controlled the forces that could consume his people until all had crossed safely.

God leads us, guides us, and does wonders among us. But he also makes the greatest sacrifices: He stands in the gap. And that same God who stood in the gap in the midst of the Jordan is the same God who stood in the gap at Calvary. There he took on all of our sin upon himself so that we might pass safely into the promised land, into the heavenly city, into our new life in Christ. We cross over from the wilderness to salvation, and we are baptized into Christ, his death and resurrection. God does the mighty act, and we benefit from events that are supernatural and contrary to nature.

Now this same God who stood in the gap in the Jordan and at Calvary stands in the gap today among us. Every time we face a crossing, every time we are asked to enter a new land, every time we take on something that we fear or a controlling sin, he is with us to lead us and guide us. He takes the place of greatest danger until we have passed through to the other side. That is the God we worship.

There is a third thing that is evident in this chapter: God fulfills his promise to exalt his servant.

In chapter 3, God promised to exalt Joshua, as he had exalted Moses, and verse 14 shows that God kept his word: "On that day Yahweh caused Joshua to be great in the eyes of all of Israel; and they feared him just as they feared Moses all the days of his life." Moses took the people out of bondage and through the Red Sea. Joshua took them through the Jordan and into the promised land. Notice that it was not Joshua who stood in the midst of the Jordan. He was not in the place of God. He was simply the obedient servant of God who was confident in the strength of God. He was willing to follow God and repeat his instructions to God's people. As a result, he became great and the people feared him.

This is highly significant. It indicates that Joshua is linked with Moses, and that after Joshua will come another Servant who will lead God's people into salvation. This Servant, whom the prophet Isaiah identifies as a Suffering Servant, will be highly honored and exalted. So Joshua is a savior, a type of Christ. Ultimately, the stage is being set for the Son of God who will be exalted and glorified. God will be faithful to his Servant to do as he promised. And because we are in Christ, we too have the hope of being raised, of being exalted and sharing the glory of the Father and the Son.

Here is the the fourth thing that is clear from this chap-

ter: We are to build memorials that will cause us to remember the wonderful acts of God.

Notice what the text says: “And thus the sons of Israel did, as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the Lord spoke to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place, and put them down there. Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day” (4:8-9).

Joshua instructed twelve men, one from each tribe, to take twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan and, using these stones, he built a memorial to the Lord at Gilgal. Then he placed twelve other stones in the middle of the Jordan to mark the place where the priests stood with the ark of the covenant. These stones were still there when this text was written.

Two words, “sign” and “remembrance,” signify the memorial. “Sign” has a wide range of meanings. Basically, the word signifies or points to an unusual event. Most of the eighty occurrences of the word refer to miraculous signs, such as the plagues in Egypt. The rainbow is a sign of the covenant God made with Noah. Circumcision is the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. The Sabbath is the sign of God resting from his work.

The word “remembrance” refers to a memorial, a reminder, a record, token, object or act which brings something else to mind or which represents something else. In Hebrew, the notion of remembering is more than a calling to mind; it involves remembering with concern. It engages our emotions; it implies loving reflection and, where called for, a corresponding degree of action.

From verse 24 we see that the miracle at the Jordan would serve two purposes. First, that all the peoples of the earth would know that the hand of Yahweh is strong; and second, that all the people of God might fear the Lord their God all their days. That memory would serve as a reminder and as a teaching opportunity to the next generation. This is explained twice in the text (verses 6-7, 21-22). Parents would take their children camping, and when they came to the memorial, the young people would ask, “What are these stones?” That was when their parents would tell them about the faithfulness and loyal love of God and how he had acted in miraculous ways to bring them into the land.

The same principle is highlighted in Deut. 6:20-25:

“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the LORD our God commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; and He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.’ So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all

this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.”

One way we can apply this text to our own lives today is to build memorials when God does a wonder, things that will remind us of his faithfulness. Memorials connect our emotions to a God who saves, leads, and exalts. They serve as motivation for us to fear him. And they become teaching opportunities for the next generation. When our children ask about the significance of a picture, a poem or a painting, we can tell them the background so that they too might fear the Lord.

Yesterday, I participated in a wedding ceremony which I will remember for a long time. It began with a slide show of the lives of the couple, dating back to when they were infants. Before the bride was given away, the family pastor related a story about the birth of the bride. Then her father spoke and shared how much his daughter had meant to him over the years. After the father spoke, the couple shared some touching words with their parents. By the time my turn came to speak, all I had to do was pronounce the couple husband and wife. The power of the service came from memories. The memories shared of God’s faithfulness was the driving force. Everyone there could clearly see that God is the mighty one to be feared.

How important it is for us to have memories of our salvation and of how God has worked in our lives. It is crucial that we connect our memories and our emotions to our relationship with God. And it is important for the church as a whole to have spiritual memories. They are a necessary ingredient that helps motivate and stimulate the spiritual community. Every time God does a wonder, we should build a memorial.

Memories are powerful forces in or marriage, too. Frequently, my wife and I recall special memories. Some are good, some are difficult, but all involve special times we have experienced together. When we sit around the table with our children we often recall family events, vacation times and special adventures we have shared. Our children never seem to tire of hearing us recall memories of them when they were young. That is why we were careful to set aside times for family vacations, so that we might have many memorial stones.

So let us fill our lives with memories, pictures, cards and monuments to what God has done. When you get married, build memorial stones with pictures, poems, adventures and special occasions. When you have children, establish family traditions and visit places that have significance for you. Fill your house with memorial stones.

This memorial to Israel’s crossing the Jordan is highly significant for another reason. The author is careful to point out that the crossing took place on 10 Nisan, the first month of the Jewish year. This date coincides with the day that the Passover lamb was selected and the subsequent crossing of the Red Sea. We find the references in the book of Exodus:

“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household.’” (Exod. 12:3)

The story continues, in Exodus 12:12:

“For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night,

and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments— I am the LORD. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.” (Exod. 12:12-14)

Here the crossing of the Jordan and the Passover lamb are remembered at the same time. Both declare the salvation of God: God passing over our iniquity; God standing in the gap; God becoming the Servant who was exalted; God initiating a new life.

In the New Testament, Jesus instituted the new memorial of the bread and the cup, which coincided with the Passover, and therefore with the Jordan crossing. This is the memorial stone for the cross, when Jesus became the Passover Lamb.

Here is how the apostle Paul put it, in 1 Corinthians:

The Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Henri Nouwen writes of this memorial: “The greatest mystery of the Christian faith is that God came to us in the body, suffered with us in the body, rose in the body, and gave us his body as food. No religion takes the body as seriously as the Christian religion...Through Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection, the human body has become part of the life of God. By eating the body of Christ, our own fragile bodies are becoming intimately connected with the risen Christ and thus prepared to be lifted up with him into the divine life...It is in union with the body of Christ that I come to know the full significance of my own body. My body is much more than a mortal instrument of pleasure and pain. It is a home where God wants to manifest the fullness of the divine glory.”

The communion table is a very significant memorial, a remembrance for the church which connects us with Christ and with our salvation. Communion is a sign of the greatest wonder of all, his resurrection. As a community, we feed on this memory, which is designed to stir our emotions.

Not only is the table meaningful to us, but it is a teaching opportunity for the next generation, as our text indicates. In some circles, communion has been seen as a rite of passage for which one had to meet certain requirements before partaking, but we have to be careful not to hinder the remembrance, because this memorial teaches the next generation.

I recall taking communion as a child in a Methodist church. Whenever I did this, I always felt that I needed to get to know better this God whom we were worshipping. The act of coming forward and kneeling was a holy time which taught me to humble myself before God. Deep emotions are stirred within me through this memory.

I don’t think God is as concerned about age as he is about the remembrance itself. Communion is a holy time for the community. And sharing communion together is not to be confined merely to our times in church. I remember once sharing a wonderful communion service on Good Friday with a group of young people in our home. Another communion service I remember fondly was the occasion when we shared the table of the Lord together as a family on Christmas morning. To me, these are powerful memories of the wonder of Christ.

Now we come to the table of the Lord together. As we eat and drink in remembrance of him, let us reflect on the words of the psalmist:

**I shall remember the deeds of the LORD;
Surely I will remember Thy wonders of old.
I will meditate on all Thy work,
And muse on Thy deeds.
Thy way, O God, is holy;
What god is great like our God?
Thou art the God who workest wonders;
Thou hast made known Thy strength among the peoples.
Thou hast by Thy power redeemed Thy people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.
The waters saw Thee, O God;
The waters saw Thee, they were in anguish;
The deeps also trembled.
The clouds poured out water;
The skies gave forth a sound;
Thy arrows flashed here and there.
The sound of Thy thunder was in the whirlwind;
The lightnings lit up the world;
The earth trembled and shook.
Thy way was in the sea,
And Thy paths in the mighty waters,
And Thy footprints may not be known.
Thou didst lead Thy people like a flock,
By the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Psalm 77:11-20)**

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HOLY ENCOUNTERS

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1160

Joshua 5:1-15

Seventh Message

John Hanneman

January 4th, 1998

At the beginning of a new year our thoughts turn to new beginnings. We like to make new resolutions and discard bad habits. Something about the cycles of life makes us want to wipe the slate clean and start over. The new year brings fresh hope. The anticipation of spring buds new energy. New things have the effect of lifting our spirits: the birth of a baby, a marriage entered into.

But shedding the past is not easy to do. Entering into a new year, a new beginning, and taking new territory can be anxiety-inducing. Our sense of adequacy is threatened. We are fearful about the uncertain future. Once we pass through that door, leaving behind old things and encountering new, life will never be the same again.

It is like that too when we become Christians. God calls us into a new life in Christ, a life of promise and fullness. We leave behind the old and by faith enter the new. In the Old Testament, this life is represented by the nation of Israel in their entering the land, that place flowing with milk and honey which God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The new year which we have just embarked upon marks our return this morning to our studies in the Old Testament book of Joshua. This is the story of Israel's entering into the land, defeating enemies and taking possession of their inheritance. We have already noted many parallels with the New Testament. Joshua is a type of Christ who leads God's people into salvation. Crossing through the waters of the Jordan pictures our baptism into Christ. Living in the land pictures our life in Christ, the Spirit-filled life. The enemies in the land represent the flesh that must be rooted out so that we might experience the fullness of Christ. The Joshua story then is our story, the story of our entering our new life in Christ.

We pick up our study today in chapter 5 of this great Old Testament book. The nation of Israel has recently come up out of slavery in the land of Egypt. Because of their unbelief, they have wandered in the wilderness for forty years, but now a new generation has grown up, one that will enter the land by faith. We have already looked at the account of Joshua as the newly chosen leader of Israel, replacing Moses. We have encountered the story of Rahab, the wonder of the crossing of the Red Sea, and the significance of the memorial stones placed there at Joshua's command. Now, in chapter 5, we find Israel on the west side of the Jordan, making final preparations to take on the enemies living in the

land they are about to inherit.

But it is not yet time for battle. Ahead lie some final preparations and holy encounters before the people will be ready. Joshua 5:1:

Now it came about when 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 how the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer, because of the sons of Israel (Josh. 5:1, NASB).

This first verse (which connects to 4:24) highlights the emotional state of Israel's enemies. Two of them are mentioned, the Amorites and the Canaanites, a sampling of the seven nations listed in 3:10. We learn that they are living in dread and fear of God and his people.

We have already seen this theme in chapter 2. When the two spies came to Jericho, Rahab told them that as the people of that place heard what God had done with Israel, their hearts melted and there was no spirit left in them. That theme is reiterated here in chapter 5, after the nation has crossed over the Jordan into the land. The enemy is thoroughly demoralized. They have no resolve, no fight, no optimism, and no hope of winning; they are resigned to defeat.

As believers, we, too, face enemies when we enter into new territory. Our life in Christ is given to us as a free gift of grace, but tasting the fullness of this life involves our going to war. And the enemies we face, although spiritual, can appear as overwhelming as those that the Israelites faced: loneliness, discontent, lust, jealousy, pride, and other things. Difficult circumstances knock us off our feet and make us fearful. The threat they pose makes us want to depend on old ways of dealing with problems. We are tempted to go back to Egypt, to a familiar and comfortable place, even if that means a return to slavery.

One sinister enemy we face today is the fragmentation of marriage. We are succumbing at an alarming rate to the propaganda of the world that says that happiness is the highest goal in life. At times we allow anger and resentment to take hold of us. But these enemies can be defeated. God is not overwhelmed by them, and neither should we. It takes courage to enter the battle, however. It takes courage to really forgive when we have been wronged, to be honest, to die to ourselves, to get help for our addictions and dependencies and the things that lead to unhealthy relationships.

Life in Christ is lived by faith; and faith gives us the eyes to see that our enemies are already totally defeated. They know what God is capable of doing and that they are no match for him.

How can we gain hope and confidence and strength in our walk of faith? In this text we come now to three powerful and very holy moments in the life of Israel as they prepare for battle. First, there is covenant renewal, then a feast, and then a holy encounter. Verses 2-9:

At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make for yourself flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time." So Joshua made himself flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness along the way, after they came out of Egypt. For all the people who came out were circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the voice of the LORD, to whom the LORD had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. And their children whom He raised up in their place, Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them along the way. Now it came about when they had finished circumcising all the nation, that they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

In the first scene, the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the nation. This is the first thing that happens in the land. The reference to a "second time" could have one of two meanings. Perhaps the first circumcision took place in Egypt for those who were over forty, and now those who were under forty, who were born in the wilderness, take part in the second circumcision. Or perhaps the older portion of the militia may have had to be circumcised again, because Egyptian circumcision was incomplete. They practiced circumcision, but perhaps not in the same way as Israel (thus the emphasis on flint knives).

Verses 4-7 detail why circumcision was necessary. In the wilderness, the unbelieving people who came out of Egypt and were not allowed to enter into the land did not circumcise the next generation. Circumcision, the rite which God instituted with Abraham, was a symbol of faith, a sign of one's entering into a covenant relationship with God. It was a very personal symbol. This sign reminded male Israelites every day of their covenant relationship with God. J. A. Motyer comments: "circumcision...is the token of that work of grace whereby God

chooses out and marks men for His own." (In the New Testament, the sign of circumcision is replaced by baptism.)

The significance of this event is further amplified when God tells Joshua, "I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt." Thus the name given to the place is Gilgal, which means, "roll away." Egypt was a place of servitude and bondage, but that bondage had been completely removed; the shame of being attached to the world was cut off now that they were in the land.

The rite of circumcision, of course, would have left the nation completely defenseless for a time. The men were disabled for three days, and vulnerable to attack, because they were in clear view of the enemy at Jericho. We remember the story in Genesis 34 of Jacob's daughter, who was raped by the son of a Hivite prince. The young man wanted to marry the girl, and his father spoke with Jacob about intermarrying with his family. The sons of Jacob worked a plan of deceit and informed the Hivite king that all their males would first have to be circumcised. The king agreed to the proposal, but on the third day following the act, Levi and Simeon entered the village and killed all the defenseless males.

The act of circumcision is a very holy moment in the nation of Israel. After the crossing of the Red Sea, God puts them in a state of complete impotence and utter dependence on him. Not only are they vulnerable before God, they are vulnerable before one another. The hill of foreskins would have made a strange, ominous sight. As a community they experience weakness and dependence. Together they are marked out as God's people; and together their reproach is rolled away.

God does the same with us. When we enter into our life in Christ, he makes us totally dependent and vulnerable. In doing so he removes the stain and the shame of the past, our bondage to the world, our worship of false gods, and puts his mark on us. The enemies we will encounter are rendered powerless. They are scared to death, but they can wait. Dependence on God is the first order of business.

The second thing that happens at Gilgal is that once the men are circumcised, they eat the Passover meal. Verses 10-12:

While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal, they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho; and on the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

The fact that circumcision was required before they ate the Passover meal is consistent with Exod. 12:44. Slaves who took part in the Passover feast had to be circumcised first—and Israel had been slaves in Egypt. Israel had crossed the Jordan on the eleventh of the

month, the day the lamb was selected. Three days later, the Passover was eaten. That was the day when the Lord passed over the nation of Israel and the angel of death killed all the first-born of Egypt.

On the fifteenth of the month, Israel celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then the first-fruits could be consumed, following the dedication by the priest. Coincidentally, the provision of manna, the supernatural nourishment of the wilderness, ceased on this day and Israel began to eat of the fruit of the land. According to Deut. 8:3, manna was provided for them so they would learn to live not by bread alone but by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God. That time had now come to an end; henceforth they would eat from the abundance of the land.

This is another very holy moment for the nation. This feast reminded them of their salvation. At last they could feed upon the produce of the land. Imagine eating manna for forty years in the wilderness! For many, that was the only food they had ever known, but now they would be sustained by the land itself.

The significance for believers today is obvious. In 1 Cor. 5:7, Paul says that Christ is our Passover. According to Exod. 12, the blood of the lamb provides for salvation, and its flesh, sanctification. And so it is with Christ. When we enter our new life in him, we are saved from death by his blood; and as we live in him we are sustained by feeding on his flesh. God's abundance is made available to us through Christ.

Circumcision and Passover point us to baptism and communion. These sacraments of the church, holy moments when we encounter God, are rich with significance. Dale Bruner writes: "The sacraments are God's hugs...God physically approaching and touching us" (quoted in Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995] p. 130). Donald McCullough comments: "Baptism and Eucharist...are mini-dramas of salvation using material props—water, bread, and wine...By washing a new believer and by eating and drinking together, Christians use their bodies to re-enact the story of God's gracious salvation in Christ. Through seeing, moving, touching, tasting, and smelling, God speaks again the creative and redeeming Word" (p. 130).

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation. It does not mark an arrival, but, rather, a beginning. And the Lord's supper is the sacrament of continuing nourishment. We gather around the table again and again to be nourished on our journey of faith. Again, Donald McCullough comments: "The Holy Spirit uses these expressions of faith to seal us with an assurance that we have been reconciled with God and adopted into the community of salvation. In this sense, these mini-dramas are a means of grace, a way in which the holy God transforms us into holy people" (p. 130-131).

The sacraments then are mini-dramas. These are the occasions when, like Israel, we act out our salvation.

The last thing that happens before the battle is that

Joshua has an encounter with the captain of the host of God's army. Verses 13-15:

Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" And the captain of the LORD's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." And Joshua did so.

It is likely that this man is an angel of the Lord, but he carries the same weight as the One who sent him. Visits by an angel of the Lord were not uncommon to the patriarchs of the O.T. Circumcision and Passover were holy moments for the entire nation; now, this encounter was the final preparation for Joshua.

Joshua is walking near Jericho when he meets this foreboding figure. Observing that the man has his sword drawn, ready for combat, Joshua asks him two questions. First, he asks whose side he is on, saying, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" The man answers simply, no, he is on God's side. His army will advance God's kingdom; and if Israel breaks covenant (which they will), then he will be against them. Hearing these words, Joshua falls on his face to the ground.

Next, Joshua asks the man what he has to say to him. The angel replies, "Remove your sandals from your feet." This reminds us of the time Moses took off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground in the presence of God. In fact, this entire chapter has several uncanny parallels between Moses and Joshua: Both struck fear into their enemies (in Exod. 15:10-13); both initiated circumcision (Exod. 4:24-26 where Moses circumcised his son on the way to Egypt); both celebrated the Passover as part of the march to the land (Exod. 12); both took off their sandals before the Lord (Exod. 3).

What a very holy moment for Joshua! On the eve of the battle of Jericho, when he thinks he is in charge of the army of God's people, he discovers that he is not the captain after all. He finds himself humbled, dependent, bowing down on the ground. But he is encouraged, too. He knows that if he follows God, then God and his host will be with him.

Notice that the connections between this story and the Jesus story continue to be woven into the text. The story of Joshua, as well as the story of Moses, is the Jesus story. Jesus, too, struck fear into the hearts of his enemies. Before him the demons trembled; the Pharisees and Scribes feared; Pilate did not want anything to do with him. Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples in the Upper Room and explained the full meaning of the Passover in himself. When he began his ministry, he was not circumcised, rather he was baptized in the Jordan. And when he came to be baptized, John said it

was Jesus who should baptize him, for he was not worthy to untie his sandal. But Jesus did not take off his sandal. He was the Holy One of Israel, the captain of the host of the Lord.

What an amazing text this is. I must admit that I feel totally inadequate to express my feelings about it. The significance of these events overwhelms me.

Here we are witness to three very powerful and holy scenes: circumcision, Passover, and Joshua's encounter with the captain of the host of the Lord. All three events point to Jesus and to his salvation. Scarcely is the enemy mentioned but he is forgotten. Israel is not to think about the enemy, rather they are forced to think about their God. What this is pointing out is that the first priority in the land, in our life in Christ, is for the community of God's people to worship: to share the sacraments; to cut off the reproach of the world; to become defenseless and dependent; to take off our shoes, fall on our knees, and encounter God; to reckon that we are not in charge of the battle. Gilgal is the place of worship. What we need is not more weapons or more know-how; we need a holy encounter with the Living Lord. This is the encouragement we need to tear down the strongholds that assail us and experience fully the life that is ours in Christ.

Worship is the dominant theme in this book. When we think of Joshua we usually think of conquest and defeating enemies, but we are now in chapter 5 and Israel has still not gone to war. Every event we have discussed brings Israel to contemplate the greatness of their God, and leads to worship, not action. Every event connects to the salvation story of Jesus. The first priority is not war, but worship. Only when God occupies his proper place in our lives will we be prepared for the battle. The question is not what we will do for God or what we will do to take the land. The question is, do we love God? Is God at the center of our life? Are we giving him the worth he is due? That is true worship. Actually, this is what the word originally meant—ascribing proper worth. Worship, said Karl Barth, is “the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, our chief end is “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

I have to confess that worship often eludes me. I am so anxious to rush headlong into the battle that I am not spiritually prepared; so anxious to learn that I engage my mind and not my heart; so anxious to accomplish spiritual tasks that I make myself the captain. We think that if we name the name of God, somehow God will be on our side. But the captain of the host of the Lord tells us that he is for God's kingdom—and we have to be careful to follow God. Spiritual warfare and spiritual life require spiritual preparation. Worship is not wasted time, it is the time of first-fruits, the time when we feed on God and the abundance of his grace, when we get re-

focused and re-centered.

Have you had a Gilgal experience? Have you encountered the holy God and become totally dependent and vulnerable? Have you cut off the reproach the world, the shame of the past, and opened up your heart completely to him? Have you been so overwhelmed by a holy and righteous God that you fell on your face on the ground? These are very holy times, times when we encounter a God who promises to never leave us or forsake us. What will it matter if we have accomplished wonderful things, spiritual or otherwise, but we have never encountered the holy God? Any one of us, wealthy or poor, small or great, well-known or hardly known, can have the richest life when we encounter God at Gilgal.

In some sense, every time we gather as the people of God we are coming to Gilgal. This is the place that is in between the crossing and the battle. We are in the land, but it is not fully ours yet. So when we come here on Sunday morning we come humbly and vulnerably in anticipation of putting God at the center of our life. Everything we involve ourselves in here, whether it is singing, praying, dedicating babies, celebrating the Lord's Table, or preaching, is meant to draw us to Gilgal, the place where we will taste and see God. Every one of us who stands up here before you wants to accomplish only one thing, and that is to quickly fade into the background so that you see only God and hear only from him.

Worship is a very subjective thing. It is striking that there is no reference to music in this chapter. What is it that will allow us to truly worship so that God is at the center of everything we do? It is the same for us as it was for Israel: we must begin with God. Daily we must remind ourselves of what God does in our behalf: He saves us, he feeds us, he talks to us, he loves us. Worship is our response to God's love in the face of Jesus.

Worship draws us into an ever-deepening awareness of the mystery of our relationship with God, connecting us to his awesome transcendence. Worship allows us to sense the divine otherness of God. If we become worshipping people we will be less fearful, more dependent on God, more pure in our heart, more successful in facing the spiritual forces of darkness, and more victorious in our battles. One writer put it this way: “Only in turning toward the Light can we do the dance, and only in this joyous but reverent dance before the Holy One will our deepest needs be met, for only then will we enter our full humanity as sons and daughters of God” (McCullough, p. 113). May we be like Joshua, ready to fall on our face on the ground, remove our shoes, and simply sit in the presence of God.

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THE BATTLE OF FAITH

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 6:1-27

Eighth Message

John Hanneman

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According to Abraham Heschel, the central theme of the story of the covenant presented in the Bible through Israel is the promise of the land to Abraham. The land was a holy place where the nation encountered God. It was the holy space where they hoped to return from slavery and exile to the Garden of Eden. To the Jews, the land is sacred. For the church, the person of Jesus lies behind the image of the land. When we enter into Jesus, we enter the land, the place where we encounter God, the land flowing with milk and honey.

However, there are enemies in this land that must be rooted out so that believers can possess life in Christ. General Douglas B. MacArthur once said that there are four prerequisites for military success. First, an army must have morale, a will to win, a cause worth dying for. Second, an army must be strong. It must have adequately trained and well-equipped personnel. Third, it must have an adequate source of supply. Life lines must be kept open. And fourth, an army must have knowledge of the enemy. General MacArthur placed great emphasis on this fourth prerequisite. He said, "The greater the knowledge of the enemy, the greater the potential of victory."

When we enter into life in Christ, we enter a military campaign in which we face various spiritual enemies, things like sinful habits, selfish desires and terrifying fears. General MacArthur's prerequisites for success find their parallel in the spiritual realm. A knowledge of the enemy and his tactics will help us greatly, but the book of Joshua says there is something even more important. To succeed in the spiritual battles we face it is essential that we know our God. Worship is the first priority, not war. If God is in command of our lives, and we are willing to follow him into battle, like Israel we will be successful. Once we are prepared, then we are ready to take on our foes.

In our study of Joshua we come now to the first battle which Israel faced following their entry into the land. At last the nation is prepared for war. They have been encouraged by the Lord and by the two spies who lodged with Rahab in the city of Jericho; they have partaken in the miraculous crossing the Jordan; they have been consecrated through circumcision and the Passover. Now they are ready to enter the battle at Jericho.

We find the account in chapter 6, starting with verse 1:

Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. (NASB)

Jericho means "moon city." The city probably was dedicated to the moon god. In many ways, the battle at Jericho is a polemic. The battle pits Yahweh, the God of Israel, against the moon god, the god of Jericho. The city was strategically located in a large oasis, in a region where water was precious; also, the city controlled the main roads into the interior of the land.

According to the text, however, Jericho was "tightly

shut." The phrase is emphatic; it is further amplified: "no one went out and no one came in." The same words are used in chapter 2 to refer to the time when the two spies entered the city. Then Jericho was shut down, so the spies could not escape. Now it is shut down because the sons of Israel are bearing down on it. This takes us back to verse 1 of chapter 5. There we noted that the enemy was demoralized and already defeated. Symbolically, the fact that the city was shut indicates that the inhabitants had rejected the God of Israel. They could have opened their gates and welcomed Israel and her God—they had heard of all the great things he had done—but they rejected the opportunity.

However, this phrase also highlights the seemingly hopeless situation confronting Israel. The walls of Jericho were very formidable. They could have been as much as 50 feet wide and 60 feet high. (We have already seen that the window of Rahab's house was located on the city wall.) Further, these walls were fortified with mounds of dirt spread out at their base. How could Israel possibly defeat such a stronghold?

This brings us to the Lord's most unusual instructions. Verses 2-5:

And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors. And you shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up, every man straight ahead."

Joshua might have expected to receive this battle plan on the occasion when he encountered the captain of the Lord's army, but the only instruction he got then was to take off his shoes. Now, the Lord reminds him that the city is already his; it has been given into his hands. Jericho would resist, but their armies were as impotent as Satan and his host before Christ and his church.

According to the plan given Joshua by the Lord, during the first six days the people were to go around the city one time with the ark and the priests blowing rams' horns—a trip of about six hundred and fifty yards. The King of Israel intended to mark out the city as his possession. In view of the huge number of marchers, the head of the column probably had long returned to the camp while the others were still marching. On the seventh day they were to go around city seven times, blowing rams' horns. Then, at the sound of the shophar, all the people were to give a

great shout, and the walls of Jericho would fall down flat. That would be the signal for them to attack, proceeding straight up into the city.

The number seven, the number of perfection and completion, is prominent in the text. The seven days of the march would correspond to the seven days of the feast of Unleavened Bread, which begins the day after the Passover. During that week, no leaven was to be eaten, a sign of Israel's consecration to the Lord (Exod. 12:14-20). In the course of this week Israel set forth from Egypt and witnessed the defeat of the Egyptian army. The combination of the march around Jericho and the Passover of chapter 5 recalls the first Passover. God would destroy Israel's enemies and consecrate the nation to himself. Also, seven matches the number of the days of creation. On the seventh day, the Sabbath, the Lord would work on the people's behalf and Israel would have rest from her enemies.

Joshua now relays these commands to the people. Verses 6-7:

So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let the priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." Then he said to the people, "Go forward, and march around the city, and let the armed men go on before the ark of the LORD."

The orders are repeated to the priests and to the people, but here they receive further information. The ark would be preceded by the priests carrying trumpets, and the armed men in front. The troops would create fear in the hearts of the inhabitants of the city, as the ark represented God's presence with his people, God leading his people into battle.

Next, Joshua's orders are carried out. Verses 8-14:

And it was so, that when Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward and blew the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them. And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while they continued to blow the trumpets. But Joshua commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout nor let your voice be heard, nor let a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I tell you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout!" So he had the ark of the Lord taken around the city, circling it once; then they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp.

Now Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. And the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew the trumpets; and the armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while they continued to blow the trumpets. Thus the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp; they did so for six days.

The pace of the story quickens as the procession of the first day begins. Verse 10 says that the armed men were commanded to complete silence. What a forbidding sight! The inhabitants of Jericho watched this huge procession, but the only sound they heard was the shuffling of the feet of two million people. In a football game, some players jump up and celebrate after every play. That does not im-

press me. The guys who get up from the pile without a word and walk silently back into the huddle are the ones that have to be feared. So for six days, the people of Jericho watched in dread as a huge multitude of people circled their city in absolute silence.

And now the fall of the city. Verses 15-21:

Then it came about on the seventh day that they rose early at the dawning of the day and marched around the city in the same manner seven times; only on that day they marched around the city seven times. And it came about at the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. And the city shall be under the ban, it and all that is in it belongs to the LORD; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. But as for you, only keep yourselves from the things under the ban, lest you covet them and take some of the things under the ban, so you would make the camp of Israel accursed and bring trouble on it. But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and it came about, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, that the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

After the people had circled the city seven times, Joshua gave the command, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city." This war cry would intimidate their enemies and encourage friendly forces. The shout is used in connection with the ark in 1 Sam. 4:5, and 2 Sam. 6:15. Ps. 89:15 tells us that those who know this triumphant cry are called blessed.

The sound of rams' horns and shophars is a reminder of other great triumphs in the Bible. We think of Gideon, whose men blew their trumpets and shouted, "For the LORD and for Gideon" (Judg. 7:20). The book of Revelation makes reference to seven angels and seven trumpets. We also recall the great triumph described by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:16-18: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words."

Jericho and its people and everything in the city is placed under a curse, a ban. The word means, "devoted to God for destruction." This is the central thought of the text. Only Rahab and her family will survive. The reason for this mass destruction, according to Deuteronomy, was to prevent Israel's spiritual contagion (Deut. 20:16-18; 1 Cor. 5:13). "Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you, in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things

which they have done for the gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God" (Deut. 20:16-18).

The first city in Israel's path received the harshest penalty. Everything was to be destroyed. If the nation disobeyed this ban, then Israel herself would be cursed. All captured silver, gold, bronze and iron were to be declared holy; they belonged to the Lord, for his treasury. The first fruits of the conquest are the Lord's.

When the people shout, the walls fall down, and every man goes straight ahead, destroying everything with the edge of the sword. Major earthquakes are common in the Jordan Valley; they occur an average of four times a century. Excavations have revealed clear evidence of the collapse of at least one mud brick wall. God's timing was perfect.

Verses 22-27 give the epilogue to the story.

And Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the harlot's house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her." So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives, and placed them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Then Joshua made them take an oath at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his first-born he shall lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates." So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

Notice the contrast between life and death, the destruction of Jericho and the salvation of Rahab and her family. The text forms an A-B-A-B-A-B pattern. Rahab and her family inherit life and salvation. Initially, they were outside of the camp because they were unclean; but now the text says that they "lived in the midst of Israel to this day." Jericho is utterly destroyed and forever cursed: "a curse is put on anyone who rebuilds Jericho." According to 1 Kings 16:34, "In his (Ahab) days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun."

As a result of this astonishing victory over the heavily fortified Jericho, Joshua's fame spread throughout the land. This is one of the recurring emphases of the book (1:5; 3:7; 4:14). Thus is the leader of Israel exalted.

What can we learn from this ancient account of Israel's first victory over her enemies in the land to which God had brought them? I will make three points of application.

Here is the first point: The land is given, but the enemy has to be removed. In order to possess our life in Christ we must dispossess enemies, which are ripe for judgment. Our enemies, of course, are spiritual: the world, the flesh, and the devil. These, too, can be compared to walled cities, like Jericho, with no way in or out. They control important

roads on which we are meant to travel. Merely because we are Christians, these enemies will not go away. We can't escape them; they have to be faced, because there is no compatibility between evil and holiness.

When we first become Christians, the enemies of the flesh are obvious. They are things like behavior problems and sin issues: compulsive, addictive and controlling behavior, immorality, drunkenness, anger, illegal activities, etc. But these are merely symptoms of deeper issues and fears. Sin has wreaked havoc deep within us, affecting our emotions and relationships. Hurt and pain causes us to become angry. Fear makes us want to control people and circumstances. Loneliness and a desire to be loved lead us to become involved in immoral relationships. A sense of inadequacy makes us passive.

Like Jericho, a walled city, our hearts shut down. Nothing goes out; nothing comes in. We block out God and people. We build a city based on our own resources and abilities to make life palatable and wall it in to convince ourselves and others of our adequacy, our self-sufficiency. Cain's response to God's judgment was to build a city and name it after his son Enoch. Nimrod built Babylon. The men of Shinar attempted to build a city with a tower that reached to heaven; then they would have no need for God, they felt. We are loath to destroy these places we build and learn instead to trust God for the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, which will come down from heaven.

Sometimes we deal only with the surface sins, refusing to face the deeper problems. Sooner or later, however, God wants us to confront the deeper pain and hurts so that we might make more and more of our heart available to be possessed by him; so that we might relate to him and to others in a much healthier way. Sin destroys relationships, the very things that God wants to restore. The object of the Christian life is not merely to look like a Christian, but to be filled with the fullness of God. Jericho controls the path into the heart of the land. So that the promises of God can be experienced, the gates of the city have to be opened. And sometimes it takes an earthquake for God to get through our thick walls so that we can rebuild the foundations of our life on him and live in his city.

Secondly, the battle is not won by our own strength, but through faithful obedience. This is what the Scriptures declare over and over. Hebrews 11:30 says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days." 1 John 5:4 says, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." Paul prays in Ephesians that we might know the "surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:19).

The battle plan for Jericho was absurd, really. What God asked his people to do was illogical. No doubt Joshua would have devised a very different plan to take the city. The success of the battle, however, hinged on the faith of God's people and their radical obedience to his word. The fact that two million people followed such a plan is amazing. God is the Christian's strength, and faith is the weapon of our warfare. This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10. I will read from the paraphrase by Eugene Petersen: "The world is unprincipled. It's dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn't fight fair. But we don't live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren't for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire corrupt culture. We use our

powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.”

On one occasion the apostle Peter wanted to use a sword to make a point, but he was rebuked by Jesus. Paul wanted to evangelize the Jews, but God sent him away on a completely different ministry. One common mistake the church makes is using the methods of the world to fight spiritual battles. Here the people of Israel were presented with the impossibility of overthrowing Jericho; they would have to rely on God and him alone to win this battle. Notice that in God’s plan the ark was central in the procession. The people’s eyes would be on God, who was at the very center of their march. If anything positive happened, God had to act. He brought salvation in the past, he would do so again in the future. Notice that during the week of the procession, no leaven could be eaten. The people would have to be content to wait and trust. Faith and flesh cannot be mixed to bring about the kingdom of God.

The obstacles to faith are formidable. That is why we are tempted to build cities to ensure our security. It is hard to have faith when we lose a job, when we suffer the loss of a child, or when our health fails. It is hard to keep our eyes on Jesus when we are reviled and persecuted. It is hard to think that God can do the impossible, so we are tempted to fall back on our own puny resources. If we want to redeem our lives from sin and darkness, what is called for is a wild abandonment to God. If we want to tear down the walls that hold our hearts captive, honesty and trust in God are the prerequisites. If we want the church to be a light to the nations, prayer and faith must be our weapons.

As we learn to walk by faith we must remember that when God delivers an enemy into our hands, we have to burn it to the ground. Be ruthless; take no prisoners. Make a commitment to not allow evil to be rebuilt in your life. Destroy the things of evil before they destroy you. Faith burns the bridges to our past so that we can live fully in the presence of God. And we learn how to walk by faith as we dispossess enemies and take possession of the land.

Thirdly, our victories of faith can redeem lives and exalt the name of our leader.

The people of Jericho shut their gates to Israel. They had every opportunity to open up their city and thus find redemption in the Lord, but they refused, so God used Israel to bring his judgment upon them. The world, like Jericho, rejects God, but it, too, faces a judgment that is very real and very sobering.

The good news is that there is an open window. Even though the city gates were shut, Rahab had a window on the city wall: “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient.” That window is Christ. By faith in Christ we can be saved from the judgment, the curse of God. The contrast in chapter 6 between death and life, between judgment and salvation, holds out the hope of eternal life. Rahab and all her family would live in the midst of God’s people.

Not only is Rahab saved, but Joshua, who is a type of

Christ, is exalted. God was committed to him, and he promised to be with him. The faith of God’s people brought victory to Israel and fame to Joshua. When we act in faith and destroy fortresses, Jesus is more clearly seen and people kneel in adoration and praise of him.

When we are willing to take on the battles of faith, people will be redeemed in the process and our Lord will be exalted. Imagine if Israel had bypassed Jericho. What if Joshua had skirted the issue and not faced the conflict? How then would Rahab have been saved? Judgment is coming upon the world, and there are many Rahabs whom God wants to save as we engage our spiritual enemies.

Supposing you take a stand for integrity in your job. You refuse to go along with the crowd, and you have to face rejection. But one person in that company sees your ethical stand and wants to know what is behind it. Maybe your marriage is enduring difficult times, but you are committed to one another and are willing to face the battles. At last, God brings life out of death. Imagine the influence that can have in a society where marriages are disintegrating. Perhaps you are suffering from a serious illness, but you have faith in God’s sovereignty despite your fear. Everyone who visits you in the hospital and people working there notice that you are different from others. As you take on your fear and anxiety, the name of Jesus is exalted.

I have a good friend, Marty, who has been involved with me in our Twenty Something ministry since 1990. Marty is a faithful man of God. Over the years he has struggled with being single, but a couple of years ago, he met Karin, and their relationship blossomed. They were married in September. There was only one hitch. Karin is German; she is not a citizen of the United States. They were married in Germany, and from all the information they had, they thought Karin would be able to follow Marty here a few weeks after they were married. It was not to be. When they filed the papers, they learned the process could take up to eight months. Many people advised Marty to bring Karin here illegally; no one would ever know, they said. But Marty has chosen the hard road. He is living by faith, even though it is painful. He is willing to wait it out. One result of their decision is that Karin has spent more time with her parents. Prior to the wedding there was tension between them. At first they were opposed to the wedding, but the time that Karin has had with them has helped to redeem their relationship. This is a direct result of the battle of faith which Marty and Karin are fighting. Their godliness speaks louder than words. Who knows how God might yet use this battle to redeem life?

God is at work, redeeming and saving, as we enter the spiritual battles that are part of our lives as believers. He is calling out Rahabs still today as he did in the days of Joshua and the battle of Jericho. Some of you were called in very dramatic ways. Now you have the opportunity, as you take on the Jerichos of your life, to show the way of redemption to others and introduce them to the God whom they have confined to the perimeter of their lives.

Where is your personal Jericho? May God give you the faith to tear it down and find life as a result.

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POTENTIAL FOR FAILURE

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1162

Joshua 7:1-26

Ninth Message

John Hanneman

January 18th, 1998

All Christians have one thing in common: We are prone to wander. Every one of us has the potential to fail spiritually. In the words of George MacDonald:

Alas! how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too deep or a kiss too long,
And then comes a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

The book of Joshua describes Israel's conquest of the land which God had given them. We have already looked at the story of the fall of Jericho; and as we dig further into this book we will come to other miraculous victories by Israel. But, as we will see, in the midst of taking new territory, the nation has to take time out to deal with sin and failure in the camp.

Like Israel, we, too, must take new territory. We must defeat spiritual enemies in the process of taking possession of our life in Christ. And, like Israel, God leads us into battle and gives us wonderful, unlikely victories. As we walk in the Spirit we begin to develop a rhythm of worship and warfare. However, sin can draw us down in an instant. At any point we are vulnerable to walking in the flesh and experiencing failure and defeat. So that we might live righteously in the land, therefore, we must learn how to deal with failure in a godly way. This is the story of Joshua 7.

Verse 1 sets the scene:

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel (Josh 7:1, NASB).

Here the mood of victory changes. For the first time in this book, Israel is in trouble. This man Achan has taken some things which were "under the ban" that was placed on Jericho by the Lord (6:17-19). Everything in Jericho was to be destroyed except the gold, silver, bronze, and iron; these were to be given to the Lord to be placed in his treasury. Although the sin is Achan's, all Israel is said to have "acted unfaithfully," as one person. This word is used to designate a violation of religious law as a conscious act of treachery. It bespeaks unfaithfulness to a covenant contract, breaching a trust, and acting under cover. God is in a covenant relationship with Israel, and the nation has transgressed that covenant. The fact that all Israel is implicated indicates the importance of the corporate identity of God's people.

The result is that the anger of the Lord burns against the sons of Israel. This isn't a slow burn; the Lord's anger blazes, as we will see in verses 2-5:

Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." So the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up to Ai; do not make all the people toil up

there, for they are few." So about three thousand men from the people went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

Thus Israel's first attempt at conventional warfare ends in failure, and they suffer their first defeat in the land. Appropriately, the word Ai means "the ruin." It is here that Israel almost comes to ruin. The location of Ai is uncertain, but it probably was in the hill country, above Jericho, on the road to Bethel. Three roads from Jericho led into the interior of the land. The southern road led to Jerusalem. Certainly, Joshua did not want to go there until he had first established a base of operations. The northern road led to Ophrah; the middle road to Bethel. Ai was east of Bethel, probably about twelve miles from Jericho.

There are other problems here apart from the sin of Achan. The leaders of Israel do not approach the battle at Ai correctly; Joshua violates holy war by sending spies and initiating conflict without consulting the Lord (Num. 27:21); and Joshua was supposed to stand before the priest, who would inquire of the Lord for him. The spies violate holy war by counting on thousands and not all Israel. The word thousand might mean a "contingent" of fifteen men. If that is the case, then the loss of thirty-six men constituted an eighty per cent loss to the nation. In any case, the spies are over-confident. They think victory will come easily, therefore they fail to demonstrate faith. In the wilderness, Israel lacked faith in entering the land initially, because they thought the enemy was too strong; here, they lack faith because they think the enemy is weak. Further, Joshua commits a tactical blunder in attempting a frontal assault against a city at a higher elevation than Jericho.

The result is a humiliating defeat. The hearts of the people melt and become as water. This phrase is used of the enemy in 2:11 and 5:1. The tables are turned. Now it is the sons of Israel who are fearful. In five short verses, the narrator brings an end to the story of unbroken success of the previous six chapters.

This account highlights a number of spiritual principles. First, one person's sin can affect the entire community and cause the whole church to suffer defeat. The church as the body of Christ has a corporate identity, just like Israel. Our health as a body depends on the health of each individual member. We never sin in isolation. My sin affects you; your sin affects me. Sin cannot be quarantined to protect us from being infected. Holiness is a corporate responsibility. We are reminded here of Romans 5, where Paul declares that through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men.

There is a second principle. The result of sin is defeat in our personal lives and in the life of the church. God hates sin; his anger burns against it. When we go out into spiritual battle, we might think that as God's people, he is with us and we are assured of victory. We have all the correct labels on our

Bibles; we have the latest bumper sticker on our cars; we wear our T-shirts; our attendance record at church is perfect. But we are wrong to think that these things will insulate us from defeat. When sin is in the camp or in our hearts, God uses our enemies to humble us.

Third, as we enter into holy war against sin and darkness, we must never do so without first going before the Lord. Israel had just enjoyed a great victory at Jericho; there they had gladly taken advantage of the might of the Lord. At Ai, however, they did not think the enemy was that formidable. The time we are most likely to suffer defeat is immediately following a great victory; that is when we are least likely to depend on God. I have seen this happen in my own life. After a victory, I let down my guard. For example, I labor over a morning of preaching, because I feel completely inadequate for the task; but God faithfully carries me through. Later in the day, when I'm fatigued, I sometimes allow my selfish desires to rule me. I argue with my wife or I become angry because something is not working out for me. The lesson is clear: we must be vigilant following a victory.

We are in trouble when we think we will have an easy victory; when we think a battle will not take the full force of faith; when we fail to consult with God; when we underestimate the strength of the enemy. The first requirement in holy war is to come before God. If we do not worship first, defeat is staring us in the face. There are no easy victories over sin and temptation. Victories over sin and addictions require spiritual discipline and God's grace. We must never think we can do it on our own.

This brings us to Joshua's response. Verses 6-9:

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and the put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord GOD, why didst Thou ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what wilt Thou do for Thy great name?"

Joshua and the elders tear their clothes and fall down before the ark. In total humility, they cover their heads with dust. Would that we exhibit such humility before the Lord when we are confronted with our sin and defeat! The ark was very prominent in chapters 3, 4 and 6. It was the place of sacred inquiry (Judges 20:18, 23, 26-27). However, there is no mention of it in the first five verses of this chapter.

Joshua comes perilously close to blaming God for the defeat, just as Israel had done in the wilderness (Exod. 14:21; 16:2-8) when they wanted to return to Egypt. He even goes so far as to think he might have made a mistake by crossing the Jordan. Israel "turned their back" before their enemies. They are on the run. Joshua is fearful that the Amorites might attack and destroy the Israelites, who were trapped by the swollen Jordan.

It is hard to believe that Joshua thought these things and questioned God's leading and guidance. Here is a man of faith, a disciple of Moses, who has followed God for more than seventy years. He has seen God do amazing things in leading the nation out of Egypt. He was willing to enter the land by faith when he was sent in as a spy. He saw God provide for Israel in the wilderness for forty years. He experienced great victories over Og and Sihon, kings of the Amor-

ites. He witnessed the crossing of the Jordan river; he saw the walls of Jericho collapse. But now at the first sign of trouble, he is rethinking the past.

I can relate to how he was feeling. Over the years, whenever I get into trouble or fall flat on my face, I wonder to myself, why did I ever leave Nebraska? When I quit working as an engineer and became a pastor and something went wrong, I would ask myself, why did I ever quit engineering? Have you ever asked yourself questions like, "Why did I take this job? Why did I marry this person? Why did I move here?" At the first sign of trouble we're ready to bail out. When we suffer defeat, we question God's leading. We think we are in the wrong place. We lack confidence. We feel impotent against the enemies of sin and evil. We want to abandon the whole operation. Joshua is just like us, even after his years of faithful service to God and to Israel.

Joshua comes close to being the recipient of divine anger, but then he does something very clever. He calls into account the name of God. This shows either his complete understanding of God's plan or else his extreme shrewdness. This is the same logic that Moses used in Numbers 14. Joshua reminds God that his name, his reputation is at stake; and that if Israel is wiped out, that reputation will suffer shame (Ps. 74:10).

God replies by first asking Joshua a question. Verses 10-15:

So the LORD said to Joshua, "Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things. Therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst. Rise up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for thus the LORD, the God of Israel, has said, "There are things under the ban in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you have removed the things under the ban from your midst." In the morning then you shall come near by your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes by lot shall come near by families, and the family which the LORD takes shall come near by households and the household which the LORD takes shall come near man by man. And it shall be that the one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel.'"

God asks Joshua one of those million dollar questions: "Why is it that you have fallen on your face?" God calls on him to deal with the facts. He tells him get up, to stop moping around, feeling sorry for himself. There is sin in the camp, and he must deal with it. Prayer and mourning is unacceptable until the impediment is removed. The problem is not with God, his promise or his leading; the problem is with the sin of Israel.

God tells Joshua that the sons of Israel have violated the covenant concerning devoted things, according to Deut. 20:10-18. They have stolen what is the Lord's and attempted to deceive both him and themselves, a "disgraceful thing" (v. 15). God makes it clear to Joshua that as a consequence of acting faithlessly, Israel is now under the curse, and this is why the nation suffered defeat.

Through Joshua, God commands Israel to consecrate themselves again and make themselves holy before the Lord by re-

moving the devoted thing from their midst. We cannot continue in our life of faith until sin is purged and we purify our hearts. God will not be with us to help us take on new territory until the impurity has been removed.

The procedure for Israel is to come tribe by tribe, family by family, house by house, man by man; then the guilty party will be taken (literally, "captured"). This is an interesting expression. The word is used of seizing towns, people, spoils, even a kingdom. Prov. 5:22 says the wicked are captured with the cords of their own sin. Achan seized the spoils, but this act becomes the very means of his own capture. Our sin weaves a web of entanglement that captures us. That is why God says we must capture sin before it captures us.

Joshua's response is quick and decisive. Verses 16-23:

So Joshua arose early in the morning and brought Israel near by tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought the family of Judah near, and he took the family of the Zerahites; and he brought the family of the Zerahites near man by man, and Zabdi was taken. And he brought his household near man by man; and Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me." So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it. And they took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD.

Now the right order of things is re-established. God speaks, and Joshua obeys, rising early in the morning to do what God commanded him. He doesn't wait a day or a week. He gets right after it and follows the procedure given to him by God, executing the Lord's order with great care.

Through a process of elimination, Achan is chosen, although we are not told exactly how. Notice that this is the reverse order of verse 1. Here all Israel becomes part of the process, every tribe, family and house. The issue is very serious. When Achan is chosen, he confesses, enumerating the objects under the ban that were taken: a beautiful robe from Shinar, which is in Babylon; 200 shekels of silver (about 6 lbs); and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels (1-1/4 lbs). Achan reveals the process of temptation and sin: he saw, he desired, he took. He also reveals his misunderstanding of holy war, referring to the devoted things as spoil or plunder. To Achan, Jericho was a prize he had earned, not something that had been won by the divine King. Achan is convicted. Joshua's messengers dig up the herem and bring it him; and they pour it out before the Lord.

Achan is a model of how sin operates in our lives. The process of temptation and sin never changes: we see, we covet, we take. This is the exact road that Eve took in the Garden of Eden: she saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable (the same word) to make one wise; then she took and ate. Desire means to covet, to have an "inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire." This is what is prohibited in the tenth commandment. In the

temptation process we rename sin, changing it into something we think God would want us to have or something we have earned. When we begin to regard possessions as our own rather than the Lord's, then we are in trouble. The same sin is repeated in Acts 5, with Ananias and Sapphira. Everything we have belongs to the Lord and to our brothers and sisters. We don't own or possess anything, not even our children.

Finally, Achan and his entire household are judged. Verses 24-26:

Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day.

Since the herem was hidden in the tent, probably with the full knowledge of the family, Achan's entire family are considered to have broken the covenant. All of them are stoned to death; everything is burned. Our sin affects the church, but it affects our own family in particular. A large pile of stones is raised upon Achan as a memorial. Two different words are used for stoning. One refers to the act of stoning as a form of capital punishment; the other refers to casting of stones upon the bodies after they had been burned, for the purpose of erecting a memorial pile. This recalls the memorial stones that were erected when the nation crossed the Jordan. The judgment is very severe, just as it would be with Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament. In both cases, the birth of a nation and the birth of the church, the first occurrence of sin receives the harshest judgment.

All of this takes place in the valley of Achor, some distance from both Jericho and Gilgal, emphasizing the concern to remove the impurity from Israel's midst. Achor means trouble, disturbance, disaster. Joshua said to Achan, "Why did you trouble us? The LORD will trouble you." Notice that all Israel participated in the stoning. His was a corporate sin, demanding a corporate consecration. Finally, God's response to Israel's obedience was to turn away from his burning anger.

Living in the land does not mean we will never have to deal with failure. It is foolish to think we can't fail. We are frail and unfinished. No matter how willing the spirit, the flesh will always be weak. Living in the land demands we deal with failure in a godly way. C. S. Lewis put it this way: "No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home...The only fatal thing is to lose one's temper and give up." No failure is final unless we give up.

How do we deal with sin in a godly way that restores our relationship with the Lord and preserves the health of the community of faith? Here are some thoughts.

First, we should not be afraid to face our sin. We must be strong and courageous, realizing the damage that sin can cause, and that defeat will be prolonged if we do not deal with it. If we remain silent, our body will waste away. Sin cannot be swept under the carpet. It needs to be exposed and dealt with. As David Roper says: "We must stop fighting for our sin and start fighting against it. The way to begin is to face the fact of our failure. The Lord won't and can't heal any-

one who minimizes his sin.”

Second, we need to deal with sin quickly and decisively. Even though we are humbled, we need to rise up early in the morning and deal with our wrongdoing. We should not procrastinate, mope or worship until we have done this. This is the theme of Matthew 5:23-24: “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

Third, we must be willing to confess our sin to God and to the community. Joshua asked Achan to give glory and praise to God by confessing his sin rather than hiding it; and Achan responded by saying that his sin was transgression against the Lord, the God of Israel. The word confess carries with it the idea of praise. When we confess our sin, we acknowledge the sovereignty and holiness of God. Confession elevates God to his proper place and puts us in ours.

Repentance and confession are the means by which believers find restoration and reconciliation. Once sin is acknowledged and brought to the light, it loses its power. We want to keep sin in the dark, hidden, because we think if it is exposed, we will be rejected. The opposite is true, however. Confession becomes a reason for praise and glory to God. Through confession, our intimacy with God is restored and even enhanced. That is what James says: “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed” (5:16).

Fourth, we need to be utterly ruthless in killing sin. This is what the church fathers called mortification. Once we acknowledge and confess our sin, then we need to completely kill that which is devoted to destruction. We are to “put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:13); to completely lay aside the deeds of the darkness, and make no provision for the flesh. We are no longer people of the flesh, living under law. We are Spirit people, living under grace. We must put on the armor of God, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and walk in the Spirit. We must simply acknowledge sin, call it what it is, ask for forgiveness, and go and sin no more.

To help us in this regard it is not wrong for us to build memorials to our disasters so that we will remember not to travel the same road again. For Israel, the memorial in the valley of trouble would be just as effective as the memorial stones at the Jordan river. That is why we have memorials to the Holocaust; we never want to go down that path again.

I have a memorial stone that I carry around with me. Some years ago, I was a sports fanatic. I wanted to be out all the

time, playing football, basketball, whatever was in season. One day I separated my shoulder playing rugby. It never healed properly, and I was left with a lump on my shoulder where my clavicle had popped up. This was the beginning of God changing my whole perspective on sports. The lump became a memorial stone to me. God had begun to heal me of my wrong desires. Every morning when I get out of bed I see God’s memorial to me, and I thank him for it. I thank him for caring enough to change me. It is a reminder that I’m headed for trouble if I don’t follow him.

Finally, we need to trust God’s promise of forgiveness and restoration. Joshua addresses Achan with a loving term, calling him “son.” Even though Achan was addressed as “son,” and his confession would glorify God, he was under the curse of death. Sin had to be judged, and the sentence carried out.

As sinners, we, too, are under the curse of sin, which is death. However, Jesus became a curse for us and redeemed us from the curse of the law. God condemned sin in the flesh by sending his Son, and he died the death we deserved. Just as through one man sin entered into the world, “so through one act of righteousness [by Jesus] there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom. 5:18).

John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). In the book of Hosea, God promised Israel that the valley of Achor, the valley of trouble, would become a door of hope to them. Not only are believers called sons and daughters, confession leads us to grace, forgiveness, and life. God is the God of fools and failures. He is the God of second chances. Sin may have consequences that we have to live with for the rest of our lives, but when we deal with it, it can work for our ultimate good, opening doors of hope for us. God takes the worst that we do and makes it part of the good he has promised. He uses sin to purify us, cleanse the church, and bring us closer to him and one another. He uses confession and prayer to make us more dependent on him and create oneness in the body.

I want to end by quoting the words of David Roper in this regard: “God doesn’t look for perfection; He knows the miserable stuff of which we’re made. The godly will surely sin and just as certainly their sins will be found out. God reveals our waywardness to heal us. We will notice defilement because He will show it to us; such work in us is the sign of His presence. And when that sin is faced and repented of, it is forgiven. Then we can go on. And going on, after all, is what matters. God doesn’t require perfection, only progress.”

May God allow us to be courageous to expose our sin and deal with it in a godly way.

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GETTING BACK INTO THE FIGHT

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1163

Joshua 8:1-29

Tenth Message

John Hanneman

February 1st, 1998

All of us have experienced the devastating results of disobedience to God: personal setbacks, broken relationships, ruined reputations. What should we do when our own sin has defeated us? How should we respond when we have been humbled by our own mistakes, when our own doing has undone us? Does God bench us for the season? Does he put us on the injured reserve list indefinitely? Should we move to another state and make a fresh start? Is life as we knew it over?

In our studies in the book of Joshua we have seen the terrible defeat suffered by Israel as a result of Achan's sin. The sin of this one man affected the entire nation, stopping the conquest of the land dead in its tracks. Following this setback, Israel accepted corporate responsibility and made corporate consecration. After a gut-wrenching process, Achan made a full confession of his sin, and he and all his family and their possessions were judged quickly and decisively. A memorial was even built to remind the nation of the consequences of failing to follow God. The way the leaders of Israel dealt with the sin in the camp was very different from how the White House is dealing with its current problems. For Israel, there were no spin doctors, no cover-ups, no denials, no drawn-out court battles, no talk shows. The nation responded with honesty, truth and unity. And the most powerful man in the world, Joshua, humbled himself before God.

But that did not bring an end to the story. What about Ai, the scene of Israel's first defeat? Would they be able to move past this fortress in their mission to take the land? Following confession, repentance, and consecration, remarkably, Israel is commanded by God to get back into the fight. This is where we pick up the account today, in chapter 8 of Joshua.

The chapter opens with Joshua receiving an encouraging word from the Lord. Verses 1-2:

Now the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear or 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. And you shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoil and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. Set an ambush for the city behind it" (Judg. 8:1-2, NASB).

The rules of holy war would now be followed scrupulously. Previously, Joshua did not get God's word before his attempt at taking Ai. Now he hears God's commands, and he will obey, following the details exactly. This time the whole army is sent out. Normally a reduced force would be employed so that Israel would be sure to trust in God, not in her military might. In the first attack, reduced numbers represented false confidence; in this instance the whole army expresses faith by going up together.

The outcome of the battle is that the king of Ai will be

given into the hands of Israel. Victory is just as sure at the outset of the second attack as defeat was certain at the start of the first. This demonstrates what can be accomplished when God's people act in accordance with his will.

In this battle, the Lord's herem, those things devoted to God for destruction, includes only the city and the people, not the livestock and precious metals. At Jericho, everything was placed under the herem, but now Israel could share the plunder. This is the pattern from Deut. 2:34-35; 3:6-7. Perhaps Jericho was a test to see if Israel would fully obey the Lord. In the coming battle, however, the temptation that caused Achan's downfall would be removed. Or perhaps, in the first battle, all of Jericho was given to the Lord, while in subsequent battles some of God's spoil would be given to his people. Also, we have to remember that the provision of manna had ceased by this time and Israel was in need of food. Perhaps this means that in our battles we receive spoils sometimes, but not all the time. We must always remember that everything belongs to our conquering King.

The battle plan calls for a cunning ambush. There is no priestly procession here, as was the case at Jericho. Thus history repeats itself. The miracle of the parting of the Red Sea was followed by the battle against the Amalekites, where God entrusted the sword to Joshua. It is the same in the history of the church. At the time of the apostles, some miraculous things happened, but in the years since, miraculous occurrences are the exception, not the rule.

Notice God's word of encouragement to Joshua. The leader of Israel is fearful, having suffered a humiliating defeat. He even questions God as to whether he is on the right track. However, God tells Joshua to not fear or be dismayed. This is similar to what God told him in chapter 1: "Do not fear, do not tremble. No one can stand before you. I will be with you. I will not forsake you. Be strong and be bold." The command to "not fear" is repeated continually to Moses, to Joshua, and to the church. The word to "be not dismayed" is descriptive of leaders whose courage has been shattered. It speaks of accomplishing a great task that has been commanded by God.

Defeat makes us fearful. We get discouraged when we succumb to sin; we become paralyzed and lose hope. Our enemies seem more entrenched and more formidable. We are afraid of getting back into the fight. No matter how many victories we have had in the past, or how many acts of God we have witnessed, we lose the will to fight. Joshua had walked with God for many, many years and he had seen God do amazing things. Yet even he needed this word from the Lord. Joshua was human, just like us. Henri Nouwen writes: "We are fearful people. We are afraid of conflict, war, an uncertain future, illness, and, most of all, death. This fear takes away our freedom and gives our society the power to manipulate us with threats and promis-

es.”

At times our fear can be more debilitating than the enemy himself. The assumption is that the only way we can be prevented from taking possession of the land is by our own fear, unbelief, and lack of courage. The only way the enemy can gain the upper hand is if we remain paralyzed by our own fears.

However, God knows when we need a word from him. When we sin, when we face defeat, he is ready with a word of encouragement that promises his presence with us. He wants us to simply start obeying him again. We don't need to mope, regret or question. When we have confessed and purified our hearts, then it is time to get back on our feet and continue the struggle. No failure has to be final. God is a faithful lover. To each one of us he says the same thing he said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid. I am with you.”

Perhaps this is the word you need to hear this morning. Are you suffering defeat at the hands of an ugly and enslaving sin? Have you have given up hope? Then God is saying to you, “Do not fear. Do not be dismayed. I am with you.” Listen to these words from the book of Deuteronomy: “When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you. Now it shall come about that when you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people. And he shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you’” (Deut. 20:1-4).

This brings us to the preparations for the battle. Notice that these details follow in the reverse order of what had been promised by God. First, there is the ambush; then the spoil is given; and finally, the king of Ai is dealt with. The account hinges on God's command to Joshua to stretch out his javelin (verse 18). Verses 3-8:

So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent 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 as at the 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 the first.’ 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 it according to the word of the Lord. See, I have commanded you.”

Remember that Ai was located above Gilgal and Jericho, about twelve miles inland; thus the men march “up.” Jericho and Ai were critical outposts to Israel's gaining entrance to the hill country, the heart of Canaan.

The plan calls for a deceptive ambush. Joshua chooses an army of 30,000 valiant warriors, five thousand of whom

will hide in the hilly terrain to the west of Ai; the rest of whom he will take north of Ai. He will approach the city as Israel had in chapter 7; and the king of Ai will observe this and come out of the city to meet them. The men of Ai will be “drawn away” from the city. The word, which means “lure,” is used in Jer. 12:3 of sheep that are lured to the slaughter. When the men of Ai come out, Israel will flee. The warriors in hiding will then charge to take possession of the city.

Next, the troops are deployed. Verses 9-13:

So Joshua sent them away, and they went to the place of ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people. Now Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai. Then all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near and arrived in front of the city, and camped on the north side of Ai. Now there was a valley between him and Ai. And he took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. So they stationed the people, all the army that was on the north side of the city, and its rear guard on the west side of the city, and Joshua spent that night in the midst of the valley.

These verses are a little confusing, because they are not chronological. This was also the case in the story of the spies in Jericho and the crossing of the Jordan. The main force and the ambush force are given separate attention. The troops make the difficult climb at night, up a steep slope. It is unclear whether they all went together or whether they proceeded on different nights. The main thing is that Joshua places his troops where he wants them. The ambush force is west of Ai; the main force north of the city. When the men of Ai awaken in the morning, the main force is in plain view of the fortress.

And now, the deception, verses 14-17:

And it came about when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose up early and went out to meet Israel in battle, he and all his people at the appointed place before the desert plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. So not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel, and they left the city unguarded and pursued Israel.

The narrative accelerates to the dramatic description of the main action. The king of Ai “saw” what was happening (it must have looked like an instant replay), but he doesn't “see” the ambush. This is in contrast to the men of Israel, who are instructed by Joshua to “see” (verses 4, 8). Recklessly, the king and his troops pursue the Israelites, leaving their city unattended and defenseless. Thus they are lured away to pursue the Israelites, just as Joshua had planned. In contrast to Jericho, which was shut up, the gates of Ai are left open as the king summons all his troops from the city, even those from nearby Bethel.

At the critical point, the Lord intervenes and takes charge. 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.” So Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city.

The Lord commands Joshua to raise his javelin, or better, a curved sword. When the sword is stretched out towards Ai, it symbolizes the Lord's sovereignty over the city. This act would be reminiscent of Moses, who stretched out his staff and the waters of the Red Sea parted. Appropriately, Joshua stretches out a sword, a weapon of battle. Once again, Joshua is linked with Moses; again, God provides salvation from an enemy through his servant; and again, God commands and Joshua obeys. It is clear that obedience is the key to victory.

Verses 19-23 give the account:

And the men in ambush rose quickly from their place, and when he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it; and they quickly set the city on fire. When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee this way or that, for the people who had been fleeing to the wilderness turned against the pursuers. When Joshua and all Israel saw that the men in ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and slew the men of Ai. And the others came out from the city to encounter them, so that they were trapped in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side; and they slew them until no one was left of those who survived or escaped. But they took alive the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua.

Suddenly the tables are turned. The men lying in ambush rush into the city, while the main force turns to face its attackers. The hapless pursuers look back and “see” what is really happening. When they see the smoke rising from their city, all their strength and courage is drained right out of them. The smoke ascending to heaven is a reminder of the language of the whole burnt offering. This implies a dedication of the fortress to God in a manner reminiscent of sacrifice. Every person is killed except the king, who is taken alive.

But not for long. Verses 24-29:

Now it came about when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field in the wilderness where they pursued them, and all of them were fallen by the edge of the sword until they were destroyed, then all Israel returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000—all the people of Ai. For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Israel took only the cattle and the spoil of that city as plunder for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation until this day. And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua gave command and they took his body down from the tree, and threw it at the entrance of the city gate, and raised over it a great heap of stones that stands to this day.

The city and all its inhabitants are completely destroyed. Joshua stretches out the javelin until everything is

accomplished. The spoil is taken, as commanded by the Lord. The king is put to death by being hanged on a tree (perhaps impaled on a pole), to show that he was under the curse of God. According to Deut. 21:23, the body had to be taken down by nightfall. Both the city and the king's tomb were established as memorials to the acts of the Lord, even as Achan's judgment had been memorialized in chapter 7.

What can believers today learn from this ancient battle story? I will offer two points of application.

The first principle is this: A life of triumph can be ours once more when we turn from sin and walk in obedience.

Just because we were defeated at Ai yesterday does not mean we cannot take another city tomorrow. As we have already learned, God brings us into the land, into our life in Christ as a gift. But there are enemies inhabiting the land, and God commands us to put to death these enemies of sin and evil, to sever our dependence on the world and place our trust in him. He wants to use our mortal bodies as instruments of righteousness. And he promises to be with us in this battle; that some day we will be completely free from these things; that we will completely shed the shame and the guilt of the past and the need for anybody or anything other than God.

However, God knows that we will fail. But even then he reaches out to us. He promises to be with us, and encourages to get back in the fight. Our failure does not change his opinion of us, his love or his plan for us. He still wants us to be glorified with his Son. Victory will come if we turn from our sin and start obeying him. This is the conclusion to the Achan story. If we don't move from chapter 7 to chapter 8, we will miss the whole point. God is a God of redemption, a God of infinite chances who is committed to making us his holy possession.

For the past fifteen years I have had the privilege of working with single people in their college and post-college years. Many of them come here discouraged and defeated, having tasted the bitterness of sin and defeat. As they put a stake in the ground and start to obey God, however, amazing things happen. Their begin to triumph over their enemies of sin and evil. Some of them come out of a pattern of unhealthy worldly relationships and God establishes them in healthy ones. Actually, some of these very people are sitting here this morning as husbands and wives. The defeat of yesterday does not determine the outcome of today's battle.

At this point I want to talk a little about the kind of victories we can expect to have as Christians. We have to exercise caution here. In the book of Joshua, both the land and the enemies of Israel were physical entities; and the blessings of living in the land were physical also. But in the age of the Spirit, being victorious and taking on new territory does not necessarily result in physical success or prosperity. Just because we lost money on our investments last week doesn't mean we can expect to make money this week. Just because we plant a stake and obey God doesn't mean we will, say, meet a life's partner and live happily ever after.

Victory comes as our hearts are transformed, as we walk in the Spirit, becoming more godly men and women. Sometimes this happens through unpleasant circumstances. We have to die to ourselves. We may not get married, we may not get that job promotion, our children's behav-

ior may still cause us pain. Victory means that no matter the circumstances we can experience peace, rest and freedom, as God gives us the power to say no to our sinful desires. Victory means that when we confront an ethical dilemma at work, we don't have to be fearful. Victory means that when we share the gospel, we can do so boldly and confidently because God is with us. Victory means that whether we are single or married, we can be content. Victory means that we are becoming more and more like Christ; we move deeper and deeper into the heart of our Savior.

The key to all of this is a willingness to obey God. This is what was critical to the victory at Ai—Joshua's willingness to count the cost, to be courageous, to stretch out his hand and to follow God. What if he had not done this? What if he had said, "I'm no good. I'll never amount to anything. Sin has got the better of me"? But no. Joshua went back into battle. He stretched out his hand and obeyed God, trusting in God's promise. That is what we must do also. We are called to get up, brush ourselves off, confess our sin, and follow our Lord. And we must do the same thing tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that, because he loves us. We are his people, and he will lead us in triumph. No matter how soundly and roundly we have been defeated by sin, we are only one moment away from entering into victory again.

The second point is this: In this story we see a vivid picture of God's judgment and salvation.

Oftentimes people comment on the ruthlessness of God in commanding Israel to destroy the nations living in the land. The Israelites were instructed to completely destroy these people and, in the case of Jericho and Ai, to burn these cities completely to the ground. What we have to remember is that God had been waiting for four hundred years to judge these tribes. God told Abraham in Gen. 15 that Israel would be strangers in a land that wasn't theirs, where they would be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But then he promised to bring them out of the land of Egypt and back to Canaan: "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16).

God had been very patient with the Canaanite tribes, but now their iniquity was complete. Their practices were an abomination. Child sacrifice and sexual immorality were just two of the terrible sins they engaged in. The cup of God's wrath was full, and Israel was God's chosen instrument of judgment. Everything in the land was under the herem, devoted to God for destruction.

God is patient, but his judgment against sin and iniquity is certain. Over the centuries, many nations have faced the judgment of God. No nation is exempt, not even the United States. There will come a day with the whole world will face a terrible judgment.

God's holy character requires him to be a God of judgment. But he is also a God of salvation. And in this account we have a sobering picture of the cost of our salvation. The king of Ai was hanged on a tree until evening; then his body was thrown by the city gate and a huge heap of stones was placed over it, a memorial which stands to this day. This man was under the curse and he faced the wrath

of an angry God.

We, too, were under the same curse; we were headed for the same judgment. But God provided for us a way of salvation. He sent his Son Jesus, the King of Israel, into the very spotlight that was shared by the king of Ai. Jesus "redeemed us...by becoming a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). He, too, was hanged on a tree, and he, too, was taken down at sunset (John 19:31). Just as the smoke of a burning Ai ascended as a sacrifice to satisfy God, so the sacrifice of Jesus became an "offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph. 5:2). Jesus became a Canaanite king for us. He endured an excruciating, humiliating death that we might receive salvation. The wrath which God poured out on the king of Ai was poured out on his very own Son. This is what happened at the cross. Just like Moses and Joshua, Christ stretched out his hands, but he did not have in his grasp a staff or sword. No. What he had in his hand was a nail. And his hands were stretched out until everything necessary for salvation was accomplished for everyone who would believe. There is a way of dealing with all of our sin, shame, defeat and failure. It came at tremendous cost: a brutal, humiliating death for the One who was without spot or blemish. And we today experience this salvation when we come to the cross and follow Jesus.

Listen to these words by John Donne that marvel at this way of forgiveness and salvation:

Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne,
Which is my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sinnes through which I runne,
And doe them still: though still I doe deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For, I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sinne by which I wonne
Others to sinne? and, made my sinne their doore?
Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I did shunne
A yeare, or two: but wallowed in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For, I have more.

I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne
My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by thy self, that at my death thy Sunne
Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, Thou hast done,
I have no more.

The New Testament says that sin will not have dominion over us. The shame of defeat need not be carved in our hearts. God has covered it all. He has poured out his stored-up wrath for our sin upon his beloved Son. All of us were under the curse, and devoted to destruction, but Jesus stood in our place. God's promise is that he will never leave us or forsake us. So he bids us to arise and not fear. He calls us to obey, to walk in the power of his Spirit, and experience the life of Christ in the land. As it was for Israel, may our own personal battles at Ai result in God-given victories, not in defeat.

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ENTERING THE MYSTERY

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1164
Joshua 8:30-35
Eleventh Message
John Hanneman
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It was Annie Dillard who wrote the words, “We wake, if ever we wake at all, to mystery.” I want to invite you into a mystery this morning.

The Old Testament book of Joshua recounts the story of Israel’s battles during the conquest of the land of Canaan. In this series we have been relating these battles to the Christian’s spiritual struggles with sin, evil and fear. At times, the Christian life seems like one long series of battles. No sooner do we deal with one crisis than another one comes along. Just when we get a handle on one area of sin in our lives, another crops up. We see signs of progress, but we learn that we have a long way to go. Battling spiritual enemies is taxing work. We have victories, of course, but even our successes don’t seem to touch us at the very depth of our being. We wonder if we are missing something, if there something else we were meant to experience other than the victorious Christian life. I believe there is!

This missing ingredient is wonderfully laid out in the Joshua narrative. We have come to my favorite text in this book, a passage that covers the events that took place following the conquest of Ai. Chapter 8, verse 30:

Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones, on which no man had wielded an iron tool; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written, in the presence of the sons of Israel. And all Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had given command at first to bless the people of Israel. Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them (Josh. 8:30-35, NASB).

This holy moment repeats the covenant renewal that took place at Mt. Sinai, in Exodus 24. It fulfills the com-

mand given by Moses to Israel, in Deut. 27. There Moses explicitly laid out the events recorded here. This is the third of four covenant renewals between God and Israel. The first two, mediated by Moses, occurred at Sinai, and east of the Jordan, respectively, prior to Israel’s entering the land. The second two, mediated by Joshua, take place at Shechem, recorded here in chapter 8, and in chapter 24.

Shechem lay about thirty-one miles north of Jerusalem, a good distance from Jericho and Ai, in the heart of the hill country. By now, the base camp for the nation had been moved from Gilgal to Shechem. Israel must have had free access to this area, either because they had a treaty in place with the Shechemites, or because the Canaanites, cowering in their strongholds, were afraid to confront them in this sparsely populated area.

Shechem was a significant place in the history of the land. It was the site of Abraham’s first stop when he left Haran and journeyed to Canaan. Here Yahweh appeared to the patriarch and renewed his covenant promise. Jacob camped here on his return from Paddan-aram; and it was here that he bought a parcel of land from the sons of Hamor. Also, both Abraham and Jacob built an altar to the Lord at Shechem.

Shechem was flanked by two mountains. Mt. Gerizim, the mount of blessings, lay to the south of Shechem. Mt Ebal, the higher of the two, the mount of curses, lay to the north. Appropriately, Mt. Gerizim still is lush today, while Mt. Ebal is desolate.

Notice that all Israel is gathered for this time of covenant renewal. The leadership is represented by the elders, officers, judges and Levitical priests. Strangers and natives are mentioned, as are those least able to defend their rights—women, children, and strangers.

We have encountered this theme of community again and again in Joshua. All Israel, including the two and a half tribes who settled east of the Jordan, entered the land to defeat the enemies; all Israel crossed the Jordan together; all the men of Israel were circumcised; all Israel took part in the first Passover in the land; all Israel marched around Jericho; and all Israel shared the responsibility and subsequent consecration following the sin of Achan.

Though the church struggles mightily with this, God’s people have a corporate, not an individual identity.

Joshua builds an altar (according to Moses’ instruc-

tions, Deut. 11:29; 27:1-8) on Mt. Ebal and offers a sacrifice, symbolizing God's claim to the land. The altar is built with uncut stones. Having the same significance as uncut vines and uncut hair, this is a sign that the altar is dedicated to the Lord and belongs to him. These altar stones, untainted by human hands, prefigure the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb. Interestingly, an altar has been excavated on Mt. Ebal, and all the scientific evidence fits very well with this biblical description.

Two offerings are placed on the altar. The burnt offering symbolizes Israel's total consecration to God, and it serves to ransom them. The fellowship, or peace offering, which was eaten, represents their relationship with God. These are the same sacrifices that were used in the ceremony at Mt. Sinai, when Israel initially ratified the covenant with God (Exod. 24). These offerings also prefigure Christ's blood, which would be sacrificed for the new covenant.

The other main activity at Shechem centers around the word of God. The law defined the character of God's rule in the land. On this occasion the law was written, read, and heard. First, Joshua covers the uncut stones with lime or plaster and writes on them a copy of the law. Second, the tribes are gathered on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, surrounding the priests and the ark, the divine King's throne, symbolizing God's presence in the midst of his people. All of Israel participates. Six tribes gather on one mountain, six tribes on the other. As instructed in Deut. 27, the curses and the blessings recorded in Deut. 27 and 28 are shouted out. The tribes on Mt. Gerizim shout the blessings on obedience, and the six tribes on Mt. Ebal shout out the curses on disobedience. It is likely that this was done antiphonally. The setting of the two mountains provided a natural amphitheater, with splendid acoustics. Finally, Joshua reads the law, the blessings and the curses, all that Moses had commanded before all Israel. Not a word is left out.

What a holy and sacred moment! Connections are made to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Mt. Sinai. At last, Israel is in the land. They are still surrounded by enemies (twenty-nine kings have yet to be conquered), but the nation stops to enter into the mystery of God and his transcendence, the mystery of sacrifice, and the mystery of the word. There are plenty of battles yet to fight, but those can wait. It is time to enter into the presence of God.

Let me comment on three aspects of this holy scene: worship, salvation, and word.

We have already noted the emphasis on worship in these opening chapters of Joshua. Memorial stones are placed at the Jordan when Israel crosses. Circumcision and Passover are experienced as the first acts in the land. Memorials are built following the victory at Ai and to remember the sin of Achan in the valley of Achor. A Shechem experience follows military conquest at Ai. Over and over we see that worship is interwoven with conquest and victory.

We must conclude that worship is essential to taking possession of the land. The internal events provide the spiritual center for the external. We cannot expect to experience God when our life is an unending series of exhausting battles. We cannot expect to have spiritual and emotional vitality if all we do is fight. We must have space in our lives to remember, reflect, renew, and refresh.

We also see that these times of worship are not just for individual, but for corporate worship. All Israel is gathered: leaders and strangers, women and children, aliens and natives. The church is the one body of Christ. It includes young and old, male and female, long-standing and recent churchgoers. Something is gained in community that cannot be experienced alone. Jesus said, "Where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20).

The second thing we see is that God is a God of salvation. The Israelites build an altar on Mt. Ebal. The interesting thing to note is that this is the mount of curses. When Israel disobeyed God and experienced the curse rather than the blessing, it was here that the sacrifice was offered. Thus Israel would learn that there was a way by which God would provide salvation. Here we have a beautiful picture of how God would provide salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus. The curse that falls on the sinner is removed through Christ.

Also, the first eight chapters of Joshua draw a tremendous contrast between life and death, judgment and salvation, blessings and curses. Following God results in life, salvation, and blessing; disobeying God results in death, judgment, and curse.

Only four characters are named in these eight chapters. The first two, God and Joshua, are like the Father and the Son. Then there is Rahab, the harlot, and Achan, the son of a well-established line in the tribe of Judah. Achan had all the benefits of being among the people of God. He had family status; he went to Sunday School; he had the word of God; he witnessed the wonders of God. But Achan sinned and was judged. Rahab the harlot, lived in the midst of a perverse society. She had done everything wrong. She didn't have the Bible, she didn't go to church, but she had heard about this God of Israel, and she feared him and the coming judgment. The result was that Rahab and her house were saved by faith in a God who works salvation. She, too, was standing in the midst of Israel on this day, along with other aliens and strangers. Rahab was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth. Thus Rahab was the great-great grandmother of King David. God's way of salvation is amazing.

This same story is repeated over and over in the gospels. When Jesus came to offer his message of salvation, the religious elite refused to listen. Just like the people of Jericho, they closed the door to their hearts. But the Rahabs, the prostitutes, tax-collectors, outcasts and sinners responded to Jesus' message. People who acknowl-

edge their sin reach out to a God of salvation.

Just like the sacrifice on Mt. Ebal, the sacraments of baptism and communion remind us of our salvation. As Christians, we gather to replay the drama again and again. We touch and see and taste, and we remember the sacrifice of Jesus, the One who became a curse for us.

Finally, at Shechem we note the care and priority given to the word of God. The word is written, spoken, and heard. God speaks, and God's people listen. The word is central to life in the land. God spoke to Joshua in chapter 1 and said: "be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left...This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall mediate on it day and night" (Josh. 1:7-8).

I don't think that curses and blessings were read and shouted so that the people would fear doing the wrong thing. The word encouraged them to live by faith, not by sight. They were being reminded that God alone could bless them. God was telling them that if they went their own way and lived life apart from him, then they would experience death. But even that was meant to draw them back to him.

Certainly Israel engaged more than their minds in this exercise. They were learning through repetition. The word was being engraved in their hearts and poured into their souls. They were being drenched with God's voice so that they would not only know the word in their heads, they would know it in their hearts, too. The word would separate them from all the other nations of the world. It manifested the beauty, the glory and the character of God. Israel was affirming with their hearts that they would follow the voice of God.

Imagine what would happen if we came here once a week and simply heard the word of God read for a half an hour. Week after week we would drench our souls in God's truth, young and old, strangers and natives alike. Through sheer repetition of the word our lives would begin to reflect the character of God as the Holy Spirit took that word and made it alive in our hearts. When we sit under the preaching of the word we aren't merely engaging our minds; we are coming with open hearts to listen to God's voice, as his word brings us into his presence.

This beautiful and powerful scene at Shechem speaks to a deep issue. It is saying that life involves more than battles and winning. Life is a mystery not to be solved, but to be embraced and enjoyed. Entrance to the mystery is gained through worship, through sacrament and word, through worship experienced in community. Everything around us speaks to the mystery. We feel it in nature. We read of it in books. We see it in the movies. Poets and philosophers ponder it. We know that there is something wonderful out there, but we don't know how to grasp it, because sin has caused a great disconnect in our souls and emotions. But Shechem is

the place where we reconnect. Worship is at the heart of life in the land.

Growing up as a child in the Midwest, I was filled with a sense of awe and wonder. I would spend summer nights lying in the grass, staring up at the heavens, listening, dreaming, sensing there was something out there. Now I can see that most of my early years were a journey in which I tried to connect to this mystery. But I was doing this in all the wrong ways. In college, I would come home from the bars and stay up until the early hours of the morning, reading Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, the great poets of the romantic age. Their words expressed what I was desperate to feel. I could hear it also in the words to the music of the '60's and '70's. There was something out there that I was missing.

Then I became a Christian, and a lot of things began to become clear. New truth helped me to see life with a sense of freshness. But after awhile, the old aches and longings returned. I felt if I tried harder and won more of these battles, then I would solve what was behind my desire to connect all of my emotions and all of my heart. I was trying to control my feelings with religion and law, but it didn't work. Six years ago, through some difficult times, God allowed me to connect with the mystery that I sensed as a boy, a teenager, a college student and a parent. The sense of wonder and awe returned. But this time it was not a vague and abstract experience; it was the voice of the Father. And I began to be content with the mystery. I realized that this was not something to be solved, but embraced. I connected not with my mind, but my heart. I could relate to the words of C. S. Lewis, "There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else."

We are part of a great mystery: the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ in us, the hope of glory. We are a part of a great love affair: God calling to us, longing for us, and we longing for him. The Bible begins with the mystery of creation and ends with mystery of revelation. This cannot be reduced to a formula. It can't be figured out and articulated in a theological statement. It cannot be grasped through winning battles. God is not a manageable deity. He cannot be tamed. Shechem is the place where we enter into this mystery: worship, word, sacrament. It is the place where God becomes the center, where we enjoy him and he enjoys us, where he loves us and we love him. What will our lives mean if we build companies, found churches or win battles, but never enter into the mystery and connect with all of our heart and soul to the deep things of God? When we are lying on our death bed, our record of wins and losses in battles won't matter. What will matter then is whether we know the heart of God.

But that is not easy. We cry our eyes out at movies that touch our deep desires, our longings and pain, but we feel none of these things in church. The difficult thing is to be able to connect all of our deep longings

with God. And yet that is what God wants. More than anything else, he wants his people to sit in his presence and experience this mystery. This is the sweetest thing in life—but it doesn't make sense.

In "Gideon," a play written by a Brooklyn Jew named Paddy Chayefsky, there is a scene in which

Gideon is out in the desert, in his tent, a thousand miles from nowhere, feeling deserted and rejected by God. One night, God breaks into his tent and Gideon is seduced, ravished, overcome, burnt by the wild fire of God's love. He is up all night, pacing back and forth in his tent. Finally dawn comes, and Gideon in his Brooklyn Jewish accent cries out, "God, Oh God, all night long I've thought of nuttin' but You, nuttin' but You. I'm caught up in the raptures of love. God, I want to take You into my tent, wrap You up, and keep You all to myself. God, hey, God, tell me that you love me." God answers "I love you, Gideon."

"Yeh, tell me again, God."

"I love you, Gideon."

Gideon scratches his head. "I don't understand. Why? Why do You love?"

And God scratches His head and answers, "I really don't know. Sometimes, My Gideon, passion is unreasonable." (Brennan Manning, quoted in Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995] pp. 104-105).

This is the kind of mystery that John Donne is referring to in his poem,

*Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you 'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.*

At Shechem, God invites us to enjoy this unreasonable, irrational mystery. He wants to ravish us. He wants us to reconnect with all of our hearts to him. When we gather in community we are coming into his presence. There is no formula, just mystery. It is the work of the Spirit. Word and sacrament become our means of worship. Our senses come alive as we act out the drama of our salvation and hear God's word pour over our souls.

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SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1165
 Joshua 9:1-27
 Twelfth Message
 John Hanneman
 January 3rd, 1999

The book of Joshua tells the story of how the nation of Israel entered into the land of Canaan and defeated thirty-one kings in a seven-year campaign. For the most part, Joshua is a story of victory. It is the account of a mighty God who fought for his people and accomplished wonderful things on their behalf. And it is a story of faith tested in battle and of community worship. As we learned in earlier studies, these twin images of warfare and worship are wonderfully interwoven throughout this book.

But the story of Joshua is much more than an account of property annexed. We cannot draw parallels between Israel's adventures and, say, the Oklahoma Land Rush, the Lewis and Clark expedition or the expansion of the British Empire. For the Israelites, the land of Canaan was much more than a convenient place to settle down. Canaan was the holy land, the new Eden, the place where God dwelt and met with his people. Canaan was the land of the great King who was named Yahweh. The Israelites' entrance into this land had long been anticipated. Six hundred years before the events of this book, God promised this very land to Abraham. Although the Jews had been enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, and then had spent forty years wandering in the wilderness, they never forgot the promise of a land, an inheritance, a pledge that was repeated to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses.

Imagine being part of that generation that finally entered into the land. Imagine being among the two million people who crossed the flooded Jordan, shared the Passover, marched around the city of Jericho, and heard the word of God proclaimed at Mt. Ebal. What anticipation and excitement the nation and their leader must have felt as they prepared to receive their inheritance!

Do you know that as Christians, we, too, are part of a much anticipated and long promised event: the promise of a seed, the seed of Abraham and the seed of David? To us, the promise of "entering into the land" is realized when we enter into Christ and the Spirit-filled life. For us, the person of Joshua is fulfilled in Jesus. It is the Lord who accompanies us as we face enemies upon entering into the new Eden. We, too, are tested in battle and renewed in worship. Christ is the place where we dwell with God. We are his people, and he promises to be with us. So we take possession of the land in a spiritual but very real sense. As we contemplate our life in Christ, do we have the same anticipation and passion that we find in the book of Joshua? Do we want to be a part of the promise of God? If we answer yes, then this book is for us.

In these chapters we learn that while the land was given to Israel, it had to be entered into and its enemies defeated. Everything in the land was under the herem. It was devoted to God, and most of it was ordained for destruction. In the same way, our life in Christ is a gift given to us by

God, but certain enemies must be defeated by faith. The Canaanite nations represent the enemy of our flesh, that part of us that is devoted to destruction, because it is under the curse. Sometimes the enemy is easily recognized, but at other times he is quite cunning. This is the kind of foe that Israel is about to encounter as we resume our study in chapter 9 of Joshua.

The prologue to this story is found in the opening verses of the chapter:

Now it came about when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the lowland and on all the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard of it, that they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel. (Judges 9:1-2, NASB)

After Joshua and the people of Israel had crossed the Jordan, the Lord delivered Jericho and Ai into their hands, and the kings of both of these cities were put to death. The Canaanite kings living in the lands south of Ai became so alarmed they sought to form a confederacy to defeat Israel. The tribes who inhabited the land no longer lived in fear of Israel. They had seen how the nation had tasted defeat at Ai, thus they know Israel was vulnerable. So instead of the "melted hearts" of Israel's enemies that we found in chapters 2 and 5, here we see a resolve on the part of these enemies to join forces. But, as David wrote in Psalm 2, "surely the nations plot in vain."

One tribe takes a different approach, however. The story of the Gibeonites is now related, in two scenes, beginning in verse 3:

When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they also acted craftily and set out as envoys, and took worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and had become crumbled. And they went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us." And the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?" But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" And they said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the Lord your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of

Bashan who was at Ashtaroth. So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, "Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; now then, make a covenant with us. This our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. And these wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey." So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them. (9:3-15)

Gibeon lay between Ai and Jerusalem, to the west of the Israelite camp. According to verse 17, the Gibeonites were Hivites, one of the sentenced nations who inhabited several other cities in the area.

In contrast to the confederacy and their spirit of resistance, the Gibeonites have a spirit of fear. Instead of getting ready for war they prepare for peace, employing a plan of deception in the process: they pretend to come from a far-off country. Everything they possess, sacks, wine-skins, sandals, garments, even their food, appears worn out, giving the impression that they have been on a long journey. According to Deut. 20:10-15, Israel could make peace with compliant cities which were far removed from them and therefore not part of the condemned nations which might pollute them.

"Crafty" is the word used to describe the actions of the Gibeonites. This word has both positive and negative connotations. Positively, it conveys the notion of being prudent. The prudent one does not vaunt his knowledge; he ignores an insult, acts with knowledge, looks where he is going, sees danger, acts appropriately, and is crowned with knowledge (see Prov. 14:18; 12:23; 13:16; 14:8, 15; 22:3; 27:12). But negatively, the word possesses the idea of a shrewdness that is contrary to the will of God. The word first occurs in Gen. 3:1, where the serpent is described as "more crafty than any beast of the field." Thus, the negative connotation applies here in chapter 9 of Joshua.

There is a certain similarity between the craftiness of the serpent and that of the Gibeonites. In each case they confused the mind by appealing to the senses. Eve was tempted by focusing on the tree, whose fruit was "good for food," a "delight to the eyes," and "desirable to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). The Israelite leaders also were deceived through their senses. They focused on the Gibeonites' food, drink and clothing, man's most basic human needs, and responded emotionally, perhaps out of sympathy or guilt. I am reminded of the people we encounter at traffic islands, dressed in rags and worn-out sandals, holding a sign that says, "Will work for food." By all accounts, that can be a very successful enterprise.

The scheme certainly worked for the Gibeonites. They came to Gilgal and made their request for a covenant. Questioned by the leaders and elders of Israel, they express a desire to become servants of the nation. Then they are questioned by Joshua. The evidence of the worn-out food, clothing and drink is further enhanced by their flattering speech. They make reference to the fame of the God

of Israel who has defeated kings and done miracles. While their speech is true, it is uttered under false pretenses. Joshua and the men of Israel ask the right questions, but they did not ask God—literally, "they did not ask the mouth of the Lord." Joshua makes peace with the Gibeonites and establishes a covenant allowing them to live; and the leaders of Israel swear an oath to preserve their lives.

The Gibeonites represent a mixed response to the gospel. Basically, we could say that there are three responses to the good news. We can fight against it, like the Canaanite confederacy; we can opt for peaceful co-existence, without submitting ourselves to it, like the Gibeonites; or we can fully embrace the new covenant in Christ, as Rahab did. The Gibeonites stand in stark contrast to Rahab. She proclaimed complete surrender to the God of Israel and joined forces with his people. Like Rahab, the Gibeonites had full knowledge of Israel and her God. They were aware of God's command to Israel to destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan. They feared God greatly but, unlike Rahab, they did not submit to him, choosing instead to rely on their own cunning. They wanted to win God as an ally, but not as Lord of their lives.

When we are confronted with the kingdom of God, which group do we identify with, the confederacy, the Gibeonites, or Rahab? Sadly, many who say they are Christians identify with the lukewarmness of the Gibeonites: they are neither hot nor cold. They want to live in the land; they want to be at peace with God and the church; they want the protection that the name of Yahweh offers. But they don't want to be totally separate from the world. They don't want to stand out. They don't want to burn their bridges. They want their own identity and their own city. They don't war against Christ, but they don't completely abandon themselves to him, either. They desire peaceful co-existence, not life-changing transformation. Here we could say that when the church opts for peaceful co-existence with the world, it loses all of its spiritual power and vitality.

A man approached Jesus one day and asked him what he would have to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him,

"You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words his face fell and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property" (Mark 10:19-22).

As we begin a new year we might ask ourselves if we are willing to come to God honestly, without pretense or disguise, making no attempt to bargain with him. Are we willing to confess that we are dead without him? Will we surrender all and identify ourselves totally with him?

Now the deception of the Gibeonites is revealed. Verse 16:

And it came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land. Then the sons of Israel set out and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were

Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. And the sons of Israel did not strike them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel. And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders. But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. This we will do to them, even let them live, lest wrath be upon us for the oath which we swore to them." And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole congregation, just as the leaders had spoken to them.

Then Joshua called for them and spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you are living within our land? Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." So they answered Joshua and said, "Because it was certainly told your servants that the Lord your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. And now behold, we are in your hands; do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us." Thus he did to them, and delivered them from the hands of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them. But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, to this day, in the place which He would choose. (9:16-27)

This second scene parallels the first. In the first scene, the Gibeonites come to Israel; in the second, Israel comes to Gibeon. As in the first scene, the leaders of Israel have a part to play, this time with their own people. And, as in the first scene, Joshua asks a question of the Gibeonites; he receives a response, and makes a decision.

Three days after the covenant was made, Israel learned of the deception. It took them another three days to make the seventeen-mile journey from Gilgal to Gibeon. The cities listed were strategically located, controlling the approach to Jerusalem from the north and west.

When the people discover the facts, they want to kill the Gibeonites, a tribe that God had ordered to be annihilated. They feared the consequences of disobedience. And then the congregation grumbled against the leaders. The word for "grumble" is the same word that was used of Israel's complaining in the desert (Exod. 15:24; Num. 14:2, 36). Some things never change.

But, the leaders of Israel stand united. They refuse to go back on the oath they swore by the name of Yahweh. Three times in three successive verses (18, 19, 20) this oath is mentioned. They do not want to be under the curse of God. They had seen God's wrath at Ai and they do not want to experience it again. Even though the congregation is not happy, they decide to follow the example of their leaders.

When Joshua questions the Gibeonites, they respond truthfully. They admit that they were afraid and say they were just trying to save their own skins. They leave it in Joshua's hands to do what is "good and right"—a crafty

way of putting Joshua on notice: was he a man who honored his word? Joshua reaffirms his oath, but he curses the Gibeonites as God cursed the serpent in the garden and Noah cursed Canaan (Gen. 9:25). The Gibeonites would forever be slaves. Three times we are told they would be hewers of wood and drawers of water—wood cutters and water carriers. Verse 27 says that this service would extend to the "altar of the Lord." While their lives would be spared, they would be reduced to a position of permanent serfdom, not allies and equals of Israel. Rahab became part of the people of God, but not the Gibeonites. One consequence of this arrangement, however, is that henceforth there would be a Canaanite enclave in Israel's midst, something that is expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy 7.

So what does this ancient story have to say to us today? The key to the text is seen in the repeated use of the words "to swear an oath" (used four times), and "to cut a covenant" (used five times). Swearing an oath is a serious matter! Swearing an oath is a pledge to faithfully keep one's word. In the Ancient Near East, an oath appealed to the name of a deity, and the oath-taker invoked a curse upon himself in the event that he broke his oath. In this case, Joshua and the leaders swore an oath, giving their word by the name of Yahweh, to let the Gibeonites live. Essentially, the oath took the same form and content as the oath given to Rahab and her family. The spies in chapter 2 swore "our life for yours," but on this occasion with the Gibeonites, the oath was given under false pretenses.

We have to look to the story of David to learn the importance of the covenant made that day. In 2 Samuel 21, we see how Saul's intolerance of non-Israelites living in the land led to the slaughter of many Gibeonites. Later, they in turn demanded revenge on the house of Saul. Since they would not accept money in payment for the blood that had been shed, David finally yielded up seven of Saul's sons, whom the Gibeonites promptly hanged, sparing only Mephibosheth.

This story in Joshua is a great lesson for us about integrity and keeping our word. As Christians, we must by the power of God confront and defeat our spiritual enemies. Some of these enemies are quite obvious, but others of them are very deceptive. Like Israel, we can be duped into making treaties and covenants. We give our word, establishing partnerships that we should never have entered into. Like Israel, we rely on our senses. We fail to take the time to ask God and listen to his word. We rush in and "lean on our own understanding." When things seem obvious and facile, perhaps that is when we need to be most cautious.

However, when we give our word, when we swear an oath we are called to be faithful, even if we have entered into a partnership as a result of deception by the other party. Our first response may be to bail out. We were taken advantage of, we say, so we are free to go back on our word. If that is our response we need to know that God takes these things much more seriously. Our promises are not so much about us as they are about God. Our name is attached to his name. As Christians, when we give our word the name of God is at stake. God is not worried about our name, he is concerned about his name.

This truth is so important it makes God's top ten list:

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in

vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exod. 20:7).

So serious is oath-taking, Jesus’ advice is, don’t do it:

“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil” (Matt. 5:33-37).

This is an important word for how we engage in business. If we make agreements, sign contracts and enter into partnerships only to learn later that other parties to the contract did not represent themselves honestly, our first response may be to bail out of the agreement, but we must remember that success or failure, the bottom line, is less important than the fact that the name of God is at stake.

And it is an excellent word for married couples. Perhaps your spouse does not share your faith. You believed he or she was a Christian, perhaps he or she even claimed to believe in Jesus, but later you found that to be untrue. Your immediate response might be to bail out of the arrangement, but we must remember that when we make a vow, our happiness and our rights are secondary matters. It is the name of God that is at stake.

This is an important word for how we follow through with our neighbors in our communities and how we honor our word with family members who have deceived us. And for parents it is a critical word. Do we keep our word to our children?

“Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,
But who can find a trustworthy man?” (Prov. 20:6).

Swearing an oath reflects the nature and character of God. God made a covenant with the human race. He swore an oath. He gave his word. He said, in effect, “I know you are sinners. I know how deceptive your heart is, but I will give you life. I will give a salvation that is not based on your righteousness, but on my righteousness. All you have to do is believe in my covenant.” And God has been faithful to his word. No matter how badly mankind has acted, God has honored his word and he will continue to honor it. This is the story of the Bible: God keeping his word. This is the story of redemption. God would have his children act in the same way.

The last word about the Gibeonites is found in the book of Nehemiah. There we read that “Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah” (Neh. 3:7) helped Nehemiah rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. When we pledge our word, we may never know what effect fulfilling our promises may have. Our loyalty to our word can have the same redemptive value as God’s loyalty to his word. That business partner we are yoked to may come to Christ through our testimony. That unbelieving spouse may be won to Christ through our faithfulness to God’s word. It may take a long time and it may cost us dearly. We may have to fight for years the temptation to bail out. We may never see the day of our vindication. The supremely important question, however, is, will we allow God to have his way with us?

As we enter into our life in Christ, God calls us to be people of integrity who honor our word. May God grant us the grace to be faithful Joshuas.

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THE DAY THE SUN STOOD STILL

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1166

Joshua 10:1-27

13th Message

John Hanneman

January 10th, 1999

One of the most critically-acclaimed movies of last year was *Saving Private Ryan*, a story set during World War II. As anyone who saw that film would agree, war is brutal and bloody, chaotic and confusing. War is the cause of great fear and emotional turmoil to many. But, as much as we would like to deny it, war is part of the world we live in, and that will not change until the day when the new heavens and new earth are revealed.

Today, we are fortunate to live in a period of relative peace. Our generation has little comprehension of war, although some of my own generation became acquainted with conflict in Vietnam, fighting the war that no one wanted. Yet, according to the Bible, we are all involved in battle, every day of our lives. On the day we were born we became part of a great cosmic war—the conflict between good and evil, darkness and light, heaven and hell, and God and Satan.

Then, on the day when we came to Christ we became a soldier in the army of God. We began to face resistance from enemies which united together to fight against the kingdom of God and the souls of men and women. The ultimate outcome of this war has already been decided, yet the enemy continues to attack, trying to root out hope, goodness, mercy, salvation, love, contentment, obedience, and trust in God. This is the battle we face every day. No matter how much we try to escape into prosperity and pleasure, in reality, life is a war.

As God's people we must be prepared to fight in this war. We must learn how to withstand powerful enemies and overwhelming forces. This is what we are learning in the book of Joshua—how to engage in holy war. As we have seen, Joshua recounts the conquest of the land of Canaan. In chapters 1-9, we had the accounts of the defeat of Jericho and Ai. In chapters 10-12, the pace quickens. Chapter 10 deals with the war in the south, chapter 11 with the war in the north. In both cases we read the story of a particular battle, followed by a summary. Finally, the entire campaign is summarized, in chapter 12. The text is laid out very systematically.

This morning I want to focus on the battle at Gibeon, found in the first half of chapter 10. The story is recounted in five scenes. Joshua 10:1-5:

Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (just as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were within their land, that he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty. Therefore Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent word to Hoham king of Hebron and to Piram

king of Jarmuth and to Japhia king of Lachish and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, and let us attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the sons of Israel." So the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they with all their armies, and camped by Gibeon and fought against it. (NASB)

In this opening scene, the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-zedek, is living in fear because of what he has heard about Joshua and the Israelites and the conquests at Jericho and Ai. And his anxiety grows when he learns that Gibeon, a great city in the Jerusalem empire, a much greater city than Ai, has made peace with Israel.

The name Adoni-zedek means "my Lord is righteous." But this man doesn't go to the Lord for help; instead, he resorts to his fellow Amorite kings. His appeal to them is, "Come up to me and help me." The kings and their cities are listed quite deliberately. Hebron was 19 miles SSW of Jerusalem; Jarmuth, which has a view of the coastal plain, was 16 miles west of Jerusalem; Lachish was the provincial capital of the Egyptian empire; Eglon was a great fortified city. City-states in Israel's world often joined forces to repel an enemy. The locations listed are mentioned twice, indicating they were great cities. This is the first serious attempt at resistance by the Canaanite kings. Unlike the Gibeonites, who had already heard of the fame of the Lord (9:9-10), Adoni-zedek had heard about Joshua's reputation (10:1). He felt he could match strength against strength, army against army. For him, it was only a matter of numbers.

In scene 2, the alliance attacks Gibeon. Verses 6-11:

Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, "Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us." So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And it came about as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.

The alliance of five kings goes up to Gibeon to wage war. In response, Gibeon sends word to Joshua at his camp in Gilgal, in much the same manner as Adoni-zedek sent to the Amorite kings, saying, "Come up to us quickly and save us and help us." The word "save" is included to counter the word "attack" of verse 4. In our last study we looked at the covenant between Joshua and the Hivites (chapter 9). Now Joshua is being asked to fulfill his word to preserve the lives of the Gibeonites. He probably should not have made this treaty, yet God will use it for his purpose. What an encouraging word for us when we find ourselves in situations we shouldn't be in! Don't worry about it. Press on. God will use it. Let your yes be yes and your no, no.

The Lord repeats familiar words of encouragement to Joshua: "Do not fear for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you." Note the interesting progression: Adoni-zedek sends to his allies; the Gibeonites send to Joshua; Joshua goes before the Lord.

So Joshua and his warriors come to the aid of Gibeon. Following a strenuous all-night march from Gilgal, an uphill journey of 35 kilometers, they came upon the Amorites suddenly. The Amorites try to retreat to the west, through the pass at Beth-horon, which leads to the coastal plain, but the Lord confounds them by showering upon them large stones (hailstones, actually), causing them to panic. The word "confounded" is used of various meteorological phenomena put into service by God, such things as thunder, lightning, and torrential rain (Exod. 14:24; Judg. 4:15; 1 Sam. 7:10; 2 Sam. 22:15; Ps. 18:15; 77:17-19; 144:6). Hail, too, is an instrument of God's judgment. Of the 29 occurrences of this word in the OT, 20 refer to hail as God's weapon wielded against the Egyptians at the time of the exodus. Israel smote the Amorites with a great slaughter, yes, but it was the Lord who pulled off the heroics. The number that died by being struck by hailstones exceeded those killed with the sword.

Scene 3 recalls the most fascinating part of the battle account, when the sun stands still. Verses 12-15:

Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

**"O sun, stand still at Gibeon,
And O moon in the valley of Aijalon."
So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies.**

Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel. Then Joshua and all Israel with him returned to the camp to Gilgal.

This, the center-scene of the story, is a flashback highlighting the most spectacular occurrence in the battle. Joshua and his warriors arrive at Gibeon from the east, following the all-night march. The Amorites, holding the higher ground, have a definite advantage. But, because they are advancing from the west they have to look into a blinding sun. To retain this advantage over the Amorites, Joshua prays to the Lord in the sight of all Israel, commanding the

sun and the moon to stand still. Amazingly, the Lord submitted his heavenly attendants to a man's command on earth's stage. The sun was probably the principle deity at Gibeon, as the moon was at Jericho.

Some scholars offer the scientific explanation of a solar eclipse for this phenomenon. They say the text should read, "the sun stopped shining." But the reference here that the "sun stopped in the middle of the sky" favors the traditional interpretation. This is the third and final act of the Lord's amazing interventions on Israel's behalf in this book (together with the crossing of the Jordan and the battle of Jericho). This story is recorded in the book of Jashar (cf. 2 Sam. 1:18), an early poetic account or collection of national war songs. So there was a day in the history of the world when the sun stood still. "And there was no day like that before it or after it."

In scene 4, the slaughter continues. Verses 16-21:

Now these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in the cave at Makkedah. And it was told Joshua, saying, "The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and assign men by it to guard them, but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies and attack them in the rear. Do not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has delivered them into your hand." And it came about when Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished slaying them with a very great slaughter, until they were destroyed, and the survivors who remained of them had entered the fortified cities, that all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace. No one uttered a word against any of the sons of Israel.

The five kings are locked up in a cave while Israel pursues the Amorites and slays them, until their survivors reach their fortified cities. The word "slaughter," in verse 20, is matched with the same word in verse 10. The words for "large stones," in verse 18, are matched with the same words in verse 11. Thus, scene 4 corresponds to scene 2. The troops return in peace and no one speaks against the warriors of Israel. Not one word of criticism is heard—in contrast to the grumbling of the people in chapter 9, when they heard about the peace treaty with the Gibeonites.

Scene 5 records the death of the five kings. Verses 22-27:

Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring these five kings out to me from the cave." And they did so, and brought these five kings out to him from the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. And it came about when they brought these kings out to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came near and put their feet on their necks. Joshua then said to them, "Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you fight." So afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they hung on the trees until evening. And it came about at sunset that Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the

cave where they had hidden themselves, and put large stones over the mouth of the cave, to this very day.

The five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah, but the hoped-for place of refuge became a prison, and finally a tomb, in contrast to David, who found the Lord's protection from Saul in a cave.

Following the rout of the enemy, the stones are rolled away and the kings are brought forth from the cave. Then, following the ancient custom, the chiefs of the men of war put their feet on the necks of the captives. Joshua commands Israel not to fear or be dismayed, and encourages them to be strong and courageous. These five kings were an earnest of God's future victories.

The kings are then put to death and impaled upon a tree until evening. This was the same fate as befell the king of Ai—an indicator that they were accursed, they were under the herem. At sunset they are buried in the cave. Large stones are rolled in front of the opening and they stand there until this day as a memorial to the Lord's amazing victory. In the same way, when God works in our lives we should take time to build memorials to his faithfulness.

As we have observed, Christians, too, are involved in a war. Daily we come face to face with the twin enemies of darkness and evil. But these enemies are not called Amorites; rather, they have names like lust, cancer, poverty, depression, anger, death, failure, worthlessness, greed, and pride. Their mission is to snuff out the life of God in us, make us fearful and rob us of our peace and well-being. We know the outcome of the war, that Satan is a defeated enemy, but what do we do in the meantime? For some reason it is difficult for us to grasp this truth as we dodge land mines and duck fire directed at us. Oftentimes we identify more with the Amorites than we do with Joshua. We are confused, we are easily thrown into a panic, so we live life on the run. We seek refuge, hiding in a cave.

This gives rise to a number of questions. How should we live? How do we take new ground? What are the weapons of our warfare? And how do we keep ourselves from being defeated and demoralized? Let us reflect upon three truths.

Here is the first truth: As we prepare for the battle we must remember to send to the Lord and we must listen for his voice.

This is the first rule of holy war. We must go to God and listen for his voice. The king of Jerusalem sent to get help from his allies, but they were not much help to him. Gibeon sent to get help and deliverance from Joshua. They had a covenant with Israel, and they looked to him for their salvation. Joshua in turn listened to the voice of God.

When we face battle, when we hear the call to arms we need help. As believers, we are in a covenant relationship with God and thus we are to send to him. But, like Joshua, what we really need is a word from the Lord. And what we will hear from him is the same word Joshua heard—a word of encouragement, one that will give us courage and strength. Throughout this book, God repeatedly speaks words of hope and encouragement to Joshua. No matter how battle-tested we are we always need to listen to the voice of God.

If we do this, we will hear from him the words, "Do not fear" (8, 25). Four times we find these words in Joshua, twice in this story (also 1:9; 8:1). We will hear the words,

"Do not be dismayed (shattered)" (25). These words are used three times in Joshua (also 1:9; 8:1). We will hear the words, "No man will stand from before you" (here in verse 8 and also in 1:5). We will hear the words, "Be strong and courageous" (this is the fifth time we find this phrase; 1:6, 7, 9, 18). We will hear the words, "I have given them into your hands" (8, 12, 19). This word occurs three times in the chapter. It is the same word translated "deliver" in verses 12 and 19. This phrase is used some 20 times in Joshua (1:2, 3, 6, 13, 14, 15; 2:14, 9, 24; 5:6; 6:2, 16; 7:7; 8:1, 7, 18; 9:24).

I have a golden retriever named Molly. Certain words have an amazing effect on her. When someone says, "Hi, Molly," she comes alive. She smiles, wags her tail, and shakes her entire body. When she hears the word "park," she starts panting, anticipating the smells and sounds of the neighborhood gathering place. When she hears the word "biscuit," she runs to the kitchen, her mouth drooling as she awaits her favorite treat. But if you say, "bad girl," she lowers her head in shame and burrows it into your lap to find love and forgiveness. That is the power of words and the power of a voice.

My words have the same effect on my children. Other people's words have that effect on me. And when I am under attack, no matter how old I get, I need to hear God's voice. Do you feel defeated and demoralized this morning? This is the word you need to hear. God is among us and he is saying, "Do not fear. I will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous. No one can stand before you because I am with you." In times of trial and temptation, listen to the voice of God.

Here is the second truth to reflect upon: In the midst of the battle we must remember that it is the Lord who fights for his people.

This principle is emphasized twice in chapter 10. Verse 14, "And there was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel." Verse 42, "And Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one time, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel."

The Lord does not fight with us, he fights for us. The God who controls all of creation is on our side, and he can do amazing things to defeat our enemies. He can rain hail upon them. He can make the sun and the moon stand still. In fact, he is the sun, as the book of Psalms says, "For the LORD is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11).

I became so engrossed in these chapters last week that I almost forgot to prepare my message for this morning. I encourage you to read them aloud, at one sitting. Here you will find a rhythm, a cadence, a repetition that is pounded out like a drum beat as each city and king is defeated: "Joshua and Israel fought. The Lord gave them into the hands of Israel. They captured. They stuck the city with the edge of the sword. They utterly destroyed. No survivor was left. Joshua did all that Moses had commanded." These verses sound like a symphony where the melody is played over and over, one time by the string section, another time by the brass section, each time with a slight variation. Read together, these chapters present a powerful image of a mighty God who fights for his people. What an

encouragement this is to soldiers of Christ!

How much do we know of the power of God? How much do we rely on the strength of his might? God's vision for us and for his church is that we might be set free from the power of sin. And his vision is not just individual but corporate, too. In this chapter the phrase, "Joshua and all Israel," is used seven times. God wants us to know individual victory, yes, but he wants us to know corporate victory, too.

God's vision is that someone could stand up right in our midst and say, "I need prayer because I am addicted to drugs"; or, "I need prayer because I am addicted to greed"; or, "I need prayer to love my family," and we could pray for the strength of God's might for that brother or sister. The enemy is strong, but God fights for us and conquers. God's vision is that this place might be a light in our community, that people would be drawn to him and find salvation because they see his power at work in you. He doesn't want us to withdraw from the world. He wants to win the world through us. As Christians, we are leading a host of captives who have been set free by the word of God. This is what God wants for us as believers and for his church.

And here is the third thing to reflect upon: When we consider the outcome of the battle, we must remember that the New Testament inverts the nature of the victory.

God did some very dramatic things for Joshua in these battles. Joshua asked God to stop the sun and God accommodated him. The bad guys who were under the curse were caught and got what was coming to them. When we come to the New Testament, however, what is striking is that "Joshua" and the "Amorite kings" trade places.

Joshua is fulfilled in the person of Jesus. He came to bring about the downfall and defeat of Satan. But the manner of Jesus' victory was exactly the opposite of how Joshua accomplished it. Jesus could have come in the same manner as Joshua, but he did not. When he was about to be killed, he could have called on his Father to stop the sun. He could have brought hail from heaven to confuse the enemy. He could have called on angelic armies to rescue him. But he didn't. Instead, the sky grew black, and he took the place of the cursed kings: He was impaled on a tree. He was taken down at sunset and buried in a cave, and a large stone was rolled across the entrance.

Jesus put himself under the curse so that we could exchange eternal death for eternal life, so that we could experience blessing. He took our place. The cross was the victory. There was a difference, however: the cave could not hold him. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. He ascended to the Father and put his foot square on Satan's neck and claimed the ultimate victory. In this, Joshua and Jesus are the same. As 1 Corinthians 15:25-27 says, "He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet" (see 1 Ki. 5:3, Ps. 110:1).

What this means is that when we go into battle we must be careful about our expectations. Certainly, God wants to give us victory, observable victory, over enslavement to sin. He wants to free us from addictions and deliver us from the power of sin. Sometimes we experience other dramatic results, too. God miraculously heals us of physical ailments. He turns our spouses around and marriages are saved. We get a job that is beyond our expectations.

But sometimes the outcome cannot be quantified. We do not get well. Our spouse leaves. We lose a child. The job offer doesn't come through. Where then is the victory? The victory for us is the same as it was for Jesus. In the midst of suffering we experience resurrection life. In the midst of brokenness we experience the life of Christ: we find peace and grace and joy and love. So, let us not be fearful and dismayed. We have been raised with Christ, we are seated with him, and our feet rest on the necks of our enemies. No matter what happens, the enemy cannot overcome God's rule and his kingdom. The cross is God's victory, and it is our victory, too, as we take possession of our life in Christ.

I want to close by quoting a verse from one of my favorite hymns. "Be Thou My Vision" has a wonderful verse which is not usually included in our hymnals, which captures the essence of what we have been talking about:

*Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight,
Be Thou my armour and be Thou my might,
Thou my soul shelter, and Thou my high tower,
Raise Thou me heavenwards, oh power of my power.*

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TRUE GRIT

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1167

Joshua 14:6-15

14th Message

John Hanneman

January 17th, 1999

“True Grit,” one of the all-time classic western movies, is the story of a grizzly old marshal named Rooster Cogburn, who is hired by a young girl to avenge the murder of her father. Rooster is played by John Wayne, in a role that won him an Academy Award. Even though he is well on in years, Rooster is full of grit, dogged determination and a resolve to keep battling, no matter the odds. In the movie’s climactic scene, Rooster comes face to face with the bad guy, Ned Pepper, and his gang. Although outnumbered four to one, Rooster tells Pepper he is either going to kill him or take him to jail. Pepper sneers, “I call that bold talk for a one-eyed fat man.” But Rooster is true to his resolve. At the end of the movie, the young girl tells Rooster, who is sitting on his horse, that he is “too old and too fat to be jumping horses.” Rooster replies, “Well, come see a fat old man sometime.” Then he gamely flies over a fence and rides off into the sunset.

In our study in Joshua this morning we meet up with Caleb, the 85-year-old hero of chapter 14 of this wonderful book. Like Rooster Cogburn, Caleb is another grizzly old codger, a man with spiritual true grit. Together with Joshua, Caleb will help us learn how to defeat enemies and take the “land,” our life in Christ, which is our possession.

The first 12 chapters of Joshua tell the story of the taking of the land of Canaan by the Israelites. The section to which we now come, chapters 13 through 21, cover the dividing of the land among the tribes. The texts are very ordered and specific. Chapter 13 begins with the account of the land that still needs to be taken, and follows with the distribution of the land east of the Jordan. Chapter 14 deals with the distribution of the land west of the Jordan, which is bracketed on both sides with the inheritances given to Caleb and Joshua (in chapter 19)—a clear indication that everything in God’s word will be fulfilled to the letter.

Even though the conquest led by Joshua has been spectacularly successful, huge tracts of territory still needed to be possessed “little by little” (Ex. 23:30). As the various tribes take possession of their inheritance, pockets of enemies and their strongholds remained to be dealt with, indicating that our taking possession of the land and entering into rest are expandable themes. Thus, the kingdom of God could be said to be “already, but not yet.” The problem for Israel was that the land was never totally possessed.

Who was this man Caleb? Let us read the text together. Joshua 14:6-15:

Then the sons of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy

out the land, and I brought word back to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully. So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God fully.’

“And now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today. I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in. Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord has spoken.”

So Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore, Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite until this day, because he followed the Lord God of Israel fully. Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba; for Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. Then the land had rest from war.

Caleb was one of the party of spies who, together with Joshua, had been sent out from Kadesh-Barnea to spy out the land that had been promised to Israel following their captivity in Egypt. At that time, Caleb was forty years old. When the spies saw the Anakim and Nephilim, enemies of great size inhabiting large fortified cities (Num. 13:27-29), all the spies, with the exception Joshua and Caleb, became afraid. However, when the report about the giants in the land was relayed to Moses, “Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘We should by all means go up for we can surely overcome it.’ But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us’” (Num. 13:30-31). All of Israel sided with the ten, leaving the nation to wander in the wilderness for forty years until an entire generation had passed away, except for Joshua and Caleb.

Caleb’s name means “dog.” At this point in history, dogs were anything but man’s best friend; they were fierce and mean. Perhaps this implies that Caleb was a fierce, mean, aggressive competitor. He was middle linebacker material. We also know that Caleb was not an Israelite but a Kenizzite. Caleb’s descendants came from a wild, nomadic Bedouin tribe that ranged throughout the Sinai and southern Palestine. He was a Gentile, an outsider who had

become a part of the people of God. But this outsider had more faith than the Israelites themselves.

By this time, Caleb is 85 years old. For 45 years he has been waiting for his inheritance. So, at the first opportunity, he approaches Joshua and asks for his share. Evidently, the spies had been sent to different areas in the land, and Caleb had checked out Hebron. Moses had promised him that he could have this land, and now Caleb is asking Joshua to fulfill the promise of Moses. Thus, Caleb, the Gentile, is given the honor of receiving the first portion in the land west of the Jordan.

Caleb is a gritty old soldier, just as strong at 85 as when he was 40. He “hadn’t lost a step,” as we say. If he were around today, he would drive a pick-up, not a Lexus. He would live up on Skyline, in the hill country, not down here on the peninsula. He wouldn’t wear fancy clothes. Blue jeans would suit him fine. And he wouldn’t care much for gourmet food. He would be quite happy with a diet of steak and potatoes. Caleb was an original.

As believers, we, too, are in the process of taking the land, possessing our life in Christ. And, like the Israelites in the story of Joshua, we must go to war to dispossess the enemies that live in the land. For us, of course, these enemies are the strongholds of sin and darkness. Caleb teaches us what it means to go to war so that we, too, can experience the rest that is referred to in verse 15.

Now I want to point out three principles from the text for us to ponder as we take possession of our life in Christ. Here is the first principle: In order to possess the land, we should not be afraid to take on powerful enemies.

Caleb’s choice for his possession was Hebron, in the hill country, the home of the feared Anakim, the descendants of Anak, the giants of the land. The proverb asked, “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” (Deut. 9:2). But for Caleb to take possession of this land, the Anakites had to be driven out. He wanted to dispossess the largest enemy, with the biggest fortified cities. Not for him some nice beach front property or golf course view lot. Caleb sought the high country, the toughest mountain.

Joshua had the same attitude (chapter 11). There we learn that the Canaanite tribes from the north joined together to fight against Joshua and Israel at Merom. The text says there were “as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots” (11:4). In spite of the numbers, God directed Joshua to attack. He led Israel in a preemptive strike, and God gave them a great victory. Then Joshua attacked Hazor, the largest and best fortified city, and burned it to the ground. He went into the nerve center of the northern tribes and blew it up, conquering the strongest city first.

If we want to take possession of life in Christ, then we must be willing, even eager, to take on the biggest, most powerful enemy in our life. As the saying goes, the bigger they are, the harder they will fall.

When my son was in the seventh grade, he announced that he wanted to play football. As much as I love football, I tried to talk him out of it, because he was a bit on the small side. However, he was determined. The day we signed him up he was the smallest kid on the team. The coaches tried to get him to lose a couple of pounds so that he could play in a lower division, but he didn’t have

enough poundage on him to lose that much. During the first week of practice, he was a little fearful. There were “giants” in the land, kids who outweighed him by 25 pounds or more. He thought about quitting. By week’s end, however, things looked a little better. Then they had a scrimmage. Johnny was playing defense, and the biggest, fastest kid on the team burst through the line carrying the ball, straight at my son. Johnny went low, took the kid by the ankles, and flipped him head over heels. The coaches went crazy, and Johnny’s fears disappeared. The Caleb attitude takes on the toughest assignment.

What is your biggest enemy, your greatest fear? It doesn’t take long for you to identify it, does it? You recognize it in a heartbeat. Maybe it is a deep rooted sin or habit, a worry that is controlling and enslaving you, a painful job situation, a hurting marriage or a fractured relationship with your child. Are you willing to go to war against that enemy? Our natural tendency is to play it safe and fight the enemies we think we can handle. We don’t go after the nerve center, the supply lines, the heart. We can’t take on all the enemies at the same time, of course, but, like Caleb, let us pick a powerful foe to begin with.

Let me illustrate. Perhaps you have a problem with anger that is destroying your life. If you do, that probably is symptomatic of a deep hurt and pain. Are you willing to face the bigger issue, to go beyond the behavioral problem on the surface to attack the nerve center? Maybe you like to be in control. Have you uncovered the hidden fears that drive that tendency? Maybe you have a problem with sexual addiction. Underneath lies a deeper issue, a desire for love and intimacy that has never been acknowledged and dealt with. Maybe you are fearful of taking on more responsibility at work, getting involved in ministry or sharing the gospel. But the real enemy lies underneath: it is a deep sense of worthlessness, of inadequacy or fear of failure. If we are going to take possession of the land, however, then we must drive out these strongholds and put Christ at the center. He is our self-esteem, our sense of worthiness, our adequacy, and we are his beloved bride.

Have you ever wondered why God wants us to take on such powerful forces? Why does he put Anakim in our lives? It is so that we might know the strength of his might and power. We tend to take on the little things, because we trust in ourselves. But we need God on our side when we take on the giants that intimidate us. This what Caleb meant when he said, “perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall dispossess them as the Lord has spoken” (verse 12). He didn’t have the resources within himself to go against his feared enemy, but he knew that God did. The apostle Paul said, “we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:9). If we take on only what we think we can handle, then we will never know the strength of God and we will not possess the land. The principle here is that we are to go into the heart of enemy territory, into the stronghold, the nerve center, and blow it up. We must live by faith, not by sight.

Here is my second principle: In order to possess the land, we must follow the Lord fully.

Certainly, this is a major emphasis in our text. The phrase, “follow the Lord fully,” is repeated three times (8, 9, 14). The same words are used to describe Caleb on three other occasions (Num. 14:24, 32:11-12; Deut. 1:36). In fact,

in Numbers 32 the words are applied to both Joshua and Caleb: “None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully” (11,12). This phrase is also used in 1 Kings, with reference to Solomon and David: “Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD *fully*, as David his father *had done*” (11:6).

The word “fully,” which comes from a verb that applies to both space and time, means fullness, completeness. Referring to space, it means to fill up something; with reference to time, it means to fulfill, to bring to completion. God’s life in Caleb was fulfilled because God filled him. He followed the Lord completely and wholeheartedly. He was sold out to God, living the kind of life that God intended for him. What a tremendous testimony to this man’s godliness! And what a wonderful epitaph: He followed the Lord fully. This is what defined Caleb as a man.

To “follow the Lord fully” means to become his disciple. It means we have to choose God over our own desires, leaving the world behind and following after him. And this involves more than just doing the right thing and avoiding the wrong thing. It doesn’t mean that we don’t sin. After all, this phrase is spoken of David, and we know what David did. Following the Lord fully means that we are being transformed into the image of Christ as our character is changed from within. We begin to think like Christ, to talk like him and walk like him. As David Roper says, “Following Jesus means walking with him, worshipping him, practicing his presence, loving him, sitting at his feet, listening to him, ‘trying to learn what is pleasing to him,’ as Paul would say.”

Whenever my daughter walks out our front door, our neighbors’ three kids follow after her. They hang on her heels and pepper her with questions. They think she is special. Maybe your kids do that with you. Following the Lord fully means we keep following right on his heels, because we are happy and excited to be with him.

Godliness just doesn’t just come about overnight, however. For most of us, the journey is rather lengthy. It involves dealing with deep soul issues, dying to ourselves and letting God have complete control of our lives. It involves all the little choices that we make every day, the sum of which determines our character. Caleb represents a lifetime of making good choices.

Following the Lord fully: this was Caleb’s and Joshua’s secret. And it can be ours, too. The God who empowered these men is the same God who empowers us today. We, too, can follow him fully. This is what will give us confidence when we begin to take on the giants in our life. This is what will allow us to face difficulties and pressures. This is what will give us poise and character and beauty in the face of powerful spiritual enemies.

And finally, our third principle: Taking possession of the land is a lifelong proposition.

God’s warrior never thinks about retirement. Following the Lord fully is a process that goes on until the end of our days. At the time when most men were long into retirement, Caleb was going out to war. At 85, he wanted to take on the Anakim.

Our society is preoccupied with stockpiling so that we can have a life of pleasure and luxury when we are old. Life begins when we retire, we hear. What does that say of life before we retire? Madison Avenue tells us that if we don’t retire to a life of ease, we have failed. That’s a big lie. My own father worked hard every day of his life, waiting for retirement. His greatest fear was that when he finally retired, he would die. That’s close to what happened. Our life is a gift from God. Let us live every day for his glory, in whatever capacity he gives us. He did not put his life inside us to waste it or to spend it on ourselves.

Caleb is a wonderful model for us. What a great encouragement he is to people like me who are getting older. We tend to lose heart as we age. Our physical strength abates; our health deteriorates; our minds grow foggy; our memories fade. I am losing my hearing now, and I need glasses to read. The cartilage in one of my knees is giving out. My back and neck are in constant pain, and some of my body parts take a long time to wake up in the morning. Getting old is no fun. It can get downright depressing.

But Caleb encourages us. We don’t have to decline in usefulness as we age. Getting older doesn’t mean we become obsolete. It can mean growing, maturing, serving, ministering, enjoying ourselves to the end of our days. Caleb was 85, but he was not about to stagnate or retire. He wanted Hebron, the hill country. And that is exactly what he got, as we read in chapter 15: “Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, the children of Anak” (15:14).

But the story doesn’t end there. It has a footnote. Caleb promised his daughter Acsah to the man who attacked and captured Debir. Othniel, Caleb’s younger brother, took on the challenge and saw it through. Maybe I should try this with my daughters! Othniel would later become the first judge in Israel, the man who saved the nation from Cushan-Tishathaim, king of Aram.

Caleb’s legacy was to empower the next generation to “follow the Lord fully.” What a wonderful vision this is for the church today as each one of us is committed to training the next generation for Christ!

It was T.S. Eliot who said “old men ought to be explorers.” I think of people like Hudson Taylor, Mother Teresa, and Oswald Chambers. These were ordinary people just like you and me who did extraordinary things, because they fully followed an extraordinary God. Caleb and Joshua are proof that one woman or one man, with God, and following him fully, can make an amazing difference. Do you want to be a Caleb? Do you want to follow the Lord fully and take on your greatest enemy? Are you ready for new challenges and new adventures?

I believe we have a Caleb in our midst. Marty Mathiesen has been a faithful servant among us for a long time. He has been through some deep waters, and yet he is not content to sit on the bench; he wants to remain a player. Marty has a vision for the future, and I have asked him to come and share his heart and passion with us.

Marty Mathiesen: John has asked me to share about some of the battles I have been involved in. The last time I spoke from this platform was four years ago. The occasion

was my wife's memorial service. We had been married for 33 years, and had dated for 37 years, and over that time our love for each other had grown exponentially. I could not have asked for a better wife. Our children could not have asked for a better mother. Then, suddenly, we found ourselves in a battle. That is what I want to share with you this morning.

Six years ago, Brenda was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor. The doctors told us there was nothing they could do. They could extend the time she had left by treating her with chemotherapy and radiation, but they said she had only a few months to live. What do you say when you hear something like that? I didn't know then, and I confess I still don't know. Looking back now, I suppose I would regard such news more as an opportunity than a battle. It was an opportunity to trust the Lord, to grow in my faith and learn what he wanted me to learn.

The thing that helped us so much in the 18-month battle before Brenda went home to be with the Lord was that every day he sent one of his warriors, believers from our church and other churches, to minister to us. As the weeks went by, people from all over the world who had heard about her response to her battle were praying for her. Every day, God walked beside us, holding our hands, even carrying us at times. He was using everything that was happening to us for his glory, and helping me to grow in my faith and trust in him.

I can say now that the peace that we as a family experienced through that time truly passed all understanding. While I would not wish for any one of you to face such a battle, know that the Lord will grant you that peace too if you listen to what he is saying to you through your battles. I know that at many times during that period I felt like asking, "Why?" Looking back on it, I probably did ask that question. But I knew enough to know that God did not have to tell me why. I knew I had to trust him.

Brenda had been the center of my life. We were inseparable. What would I do? A few months after her death, I was sitting here in church, feeling a deep void. Something is wrong here, I thought. I'm missing something. It was then I realized that I wasn't doing anything or involved in anything. That was the void I felt. I was sitting in church, soaking things in, not giving anything in return, so there was no more room left in me for the Lord to fill. I prayed and asked him what he wanted me to do.

Then I picked up our bulletin and read about a need for someone to work with our two-year-olds, and the following Sunday I found myself sitting among them. Now, I'm

six feet five inches tall, and much older than John Hanne-man. I have even more aches than he has, and my two eyes would equal about one good eye. You should see me getting down on the floor and getting up again several times each Sunday morning with these little ones. It's a sight.

That was four years ago, and I'm still working with them. As I started to give something out, the Lord began to fill me. I began to give back to some of those people who worked with the children while my own kids were growing up, so that I could be here in church. And how rewarding it was to know that some of you parents could be in church while I and some other workers loved your two-year-olds. An extra added thrill is to see the look of excitement on the faces of these little ones as we greet them each Sunday morning.

But, as I near retirement, I know that will come to an end, too. I'm a high school teacher, and, as retirement looms, I have been wondering, what next? Plant flowers? Visit a few beaches and watch the sun set? These don't sound very fulfilling. I asked myself, what do I enjoy doing? And what am I good at? Those questions were easy to answer. I love teaching. I love working with teenagers. And I love traveling overseas.

Earlier in our marriage, my wife and I had spent two years working in Ethiopia with the Peace Corps and two more years in Liberia. Back then, we spent a lot of time getting to know missionaries. So, I love kids, I love teaching teenagers, and I love being overseas. I wondered, what about teaching in an overseas missions school somewhere, Africa, South America or Asia? That seemed to fit all the criteria. With my retirement plan from teaching all those years I'm able to support myself, so I don't need to raise funds.

When I interviewed with one agency last summer, they asked me if I could go the next day! I told them I still had a few obligations remaining, but I know that down the road a little, I will be able to go. I don't know what battles or what giants I will face when I get there, but God has given me a vision, and he will be with me to comfort and guide me.

Earlier, John made mention of the "good" life. I would like to take one letter out of that word and talk about the "God" life. My wife and I had a very good life while we were together. But all that will come to an end one day. Now what I hope to focus on and be attuned to is God's life and how he wants me to handle the battles ahead as I strive to be his witness here on earth. I pray he will give me strength to keep doing that.

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GRACE IN CITY GATES

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1168

Joshua 20:1-21:45

15th Message

John Hanneman

January 31st, 1999

The world in which we live and conduct our business is anti-God. Most of what we see and experience daily has the effect of drawing us away from God, not toward him. The world doesn't give us daily reminders of who God is, what he thinks or how he operates. On the contrary, we are continually faced with our inadequacies, with the result that we often try to compensate for what we lack, using ungodly methods in the process.

Things were very different for Israel in the Old Testament. For them, life in the land was filled with constant reminders of God's presence and sovereign activity among them—things like memorial stones, altars, heaps of rocks, a tabernacle, and later, a temple. All of these visual aids reminded the nation of the wonder and grace of God.

This concept of images and metaphors is a recurring theme in the book of Joshua. Today, we come to chapters 20 and 21 in our studies. This section of the book is unfamiliar material to most. We would not expect to spend a lot of time studying these chapters, yet they are quite intriguing in that they refer to two categories of special cities in the land, places which helped Israel learn more about God. As we will see, chapter 20 deals with the cities of refuge, and chapter 21 with the Levitical cities.

The book of Joshua is a carefully designed and structured narrative. In the opening 12 chapters we saw that the land was given to Israel; and in chapters 13-21 that it was divided among the people. The end of chapter 21 has a summary statement declaring that everything that God had promised Israel had been fulfilled: "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers" (21:43).

Here in chapters 20 and 21, however, we find that some of the land is given back to God as a tithe. This tithe consists of cities which were given to support the needs of the entire community. The conditions and requirements for these cities had already been carefully delineated by God to Moses and recorded in the Torah. While these places represent a detailed and practical design by God for life in the land, they also present to Israel a constant reminder that God was living amongst them. As we come to our text, it is my prayer that we might see the relevance of these accounts to our own lives.

Let's begin by reading chapter 20 together.

Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Designate the cities of

refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood. And he shall flee to one of these cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city and state his case in the hearing of the elders of that city; and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, so that he may dwell among them. Now if the avenger of blood pursues him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor without premeditation and did not hate him beforehand. And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the manslayer shall return to his own city and to his own house, to the city from which he fled.' "

So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. And beyond the Jordan east of Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plain from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. These were the appointed cities for all the sons of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them, that whoever kills any person unintentionally may flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation. (Josh. 20:1-9, NASB)

Six cities, three lying east of the Jordan and three west of the river, were designated as cities of refuge. The instructions for these cities, which are quite detailed, are given in Deut. 4 and 19, Num. 35 and Exod. 21. These locations were set aside to provide protection for anyone who took the life of another by accident. We find an illustration of this very thing in these words from the book of Deuteronomy: "Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously—as when a man goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron head slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live" (Deut. 19:4-5).

In the event of an accidental death, therefore, the one who shed blood "unintentionally" (through error), and

“without knowledge” (without premeditation) could flee to one of these cities of refuge, which were located so that one could flee to them in a day’s travel. The family of the deceased would then select an “avenger of blood” (in Hebrew: *go’el*), the closest male relative of the one slain, whose task it was to restore the balance in family relations. Retribution, not vengeance, was the purpose behind this. The avenger was not expected to make a distinction between intentional and unintentional slaying. Following the accidental killing, the manslayer would flee to the nearest city of refuge, pursued by the avenger.

Upon the manslayer’s arrival at the city, the elders, all of whom were Levites (since these were Levitical cities), held a preliminary trial at the city gate, the place where court was held in ancient Israel. If the manslayer was found innocent, they granted him asylum from the avenger of blood and sent him to stand trial before the assembly, a sort of parliament with judicial powers. If he was found guilty at the preliminary trial, he would be delivered over to the avenger of blood.

Later there would be a more formal trial. It is unclear where this trial before the assembly was staged, whether it was held in the city where the homicide occurred or the place where asylum was granted. If the assembly found him guilty, he was handed over to the family protector for execution; if he was found innocent, he was taken back to the city of refuge. Thus the city of refuge was like a prison. If the manslayer left the city borders, then the avenger could kill him and not be found guilty of murder. Upon the death of the high priest, the manslayer was free to return to his home. These laws and procedures applied not only to the native born, but also to the stranger, the sojourner. Israel had a universal code of justice

The guiding concern behind all of this ritual was the shedding of blood in the land. Innocent blood must find satisfaction. The Lord inquires into and vindicates innocent blood (Gen. 4:10-11; 9:5-6; 2 Sam. 16:7-8). “So innocent blood will not be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and bloodguiltiness be on you” (Deut. 19:10). Homicidal blood had the effect of polluting the land. It called forth judgment both by the Lord and by the family protector who was obliged to seek justice, not revenge, for his family. “So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it” (Num. 35:33).

Thus, innocent blood was expiated either by the death of the murderer or by atonement (Deut. 21:7-9); otherwise it brought upon the land the Lord’s wrath. Initially, those found not guilty of homicide could seek asylum at the altar, but those who killed with premeditation would be dragged from the altar and executed (Exod. 21:12-14). Deut. 21:9 says: “So you shall remove the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the eyes of the LORD.”

So, the shedding of innocent blood is a matter of extreme importance to God. We know this from the Genesis account. When Cain killed his brother Abel, the voice of Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground.

The significance of these cities can be demonstrated on three levels. First, life is extremely valuable and it should be protected.

God places a high premium on human life, because he created man in his own image. In Israel, where capital punishment was practiced, murderers could not avoid justice, and the responsibility for implementing justice was shared by all the people in the land (although in light of our Lord’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount we might alter our view). However, capital punishment, when it is correctly understood, guards the sanctity of human life. Murder, in contrast, has the effect of cheapening human life. It is an outrage. Any time we devalue or dishonor another human being, we dishonor God.

As I studied this text last week, I thought about the issue of abortion. Can there be any doubt that one day God will pour forth his wrath on our society over this shedding of innocent blood? I thought also of the killing of the thirteen-year-old girl, Christina Williams, in Monterey, which has caused widespread grief among the community. Her innocent blood cries out to God. The value of human life should affect the way we interact with society: how we relate to others, how we conduct business, how we treat our neighbor, even how we drive our cars. Human life is a most precious commodity. Yet, tragically, we often value material things more than people.

On a second level, Christ is a city where we can find a place of refuge.

As manslaughterers could find safety and protection in the cities of refuge, Jesus is the city of refuge for believers. He is the place where we can run to when death is pursuing us.

These cities of refuge have at least four interesting parallels to Jesus. For one thing, they were very accessible. According to Deut. 19, roads were built to these cities, bridges built over ravines, etc., so that fugitives could take the shortest possible route to safety. And these roads were carefully repaired each spring. At every crossroads, a special sign was erected, which read, “Refuge! Refuge!” in letters so large that someone who was running could read them without stopping.

Second, the doors of the cities of refuge always remained unlocked, in contrast to the doors of other cities which were locked to protect residents from robbers and vandals. In times of war, the gates were always locked, but not so the cities of refuge. Third, the cities of refuge were not only for Jews but for people of all races. And fourth, if we wander outside the boundaries of the city, death pursues us.

For Christians, Jesus is a city of refuge. He is accessible. The way is always open so anyone can come. Jesus

expands the idea of the city of refuge, because we can come to him when we are guilty or innocent. And, unlike the city of refuge, we do not have to run a great distance to find shelter, because Christ is a refuge who is always available. We are to be diligent to build bridges, repair roads and make signs to show that anyone who is lost or in trouble might find the way to salvation. Thus, the cities of refuge here in Joshua were a reminder of the coming Messiah. Following the first service this morning, Bernard Bell told me the story of Don Richardson, a missionary to a remote cannibal tribe. It seems that if one stood in a certain area in this tribe's territory, a place that was marked out by a circle of stones, his life was protected. It was from this safe place that Don Richardson was able to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to this tribe.

Now the third level: The most strikingly significant thing about the city of refuge is that it provided a constant reminder of the notion of substitutionary death and satisfaction for innocent blood. We see this in the death of the high priest and the idea of an avenger of blood.

The concept of substitutionary death is evident in the person of the high priest. A manslayer's life was protected in the city of refuge, yet he was imprisoned, essentially, confined within the walls of the city. However, when the high priest died, the manslayer could return to his home. The high priest, who was Israel's chief representative before God, was anointed with oil. His death atoned for innocent blood. His life was substituted for another.

According to the book of Hebrews, Jesus is our high priest. He was anointed with oil. His death satisfied God's justice for innocent blood, setting us free from the prison of our sin, whether it was intentional or not.

But we also see the concept of substitutionary death in the person of the avenger of blood. This time there is a slight twist, however. The human race is locked in sin and destined for death. There is no way of escape except through Christ. In Adam, "sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). But God selected a *go'el*, his own Son, an avenger of blood, to accomplish retribution. However, this *go'el* came not to judge but to save. Instead of taking our lives, he gave his life for us. Instead of killing, he was killed. Instead of taking blood, he shed his blood. Jesus was a *go'el* like no one had ever seen or imagined. His blood provides justice for the innocent blood that we shed. In Christ, God's justice was satisfied, as it must be. What an incredible twist to this whole process that God had established in Israel!

What intrigues me about this whole concept of cities of refuge is that in them we keep seeing Jesus. Jesus is the city. He is the high priest. He is the *go'el* who exchanged places with the manslayer. The recurring theme is that we are alive because of the substitutionary death of Another. In these cities, Israel had a constant,

daily reminder of this spiritual truth.

This is the gospel in its purest form, isn't it? Substitutionary death forms the whole basis of our life in Christ. What is the basis of your life? What is the lens through which you see God, yourself, your sin, your family, and the world? If we don't begin with the cross, then everything we do will be skewed. We will build on the wrong foundation. Jesus was an avenger of blood who traded places with us. He paid the cost for the innocent blood that we shed. What a glorious gospel we are privileged to share!

The world does not model this, of course. The world proclaims that we should strengthen ourselves in the face of our inadequacies; lay blame in the face of our guilt; and promote ourselves at the expense of others in the face of our weaknesses. But Jesus laid down his life for ours, and now he asks us to lay down our lives for others. So, in these cities Israel had a reminder built into the very fabric of their everyday life that pointed them to the idea of substitutionary death, one that looked forward to the cross.

The Levitical cities that we find discussed in chapter 21 are equally as intriguing.

Then the heads of the households of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of households of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to live in, with their pasture lands for our cattle." So the sons of Israel gave the Levites from their inheritance these cities with their pasture lands, according to the command of the LORD (Josh. 21:1-3).

This chapter lists forty-eight cities that were given by the twelve tribes to the descendants of Levi. If you remember, Levi and Simeon had no inheritance in the land because of their massacre of the Shechemites, recorded in Genesis 34. Simeon was given places to live within the territory of Judah; and Moses promised the Levites forty-eight cities spread throughout the land. Twelve tribes received territory in the land because Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were each given a full inheritance.

These forty-eight cities were allotted to the three branches of Levi. He had three sons, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Aaron was a descendant of Kohath and his sons were priests. The forty-eight cities included the six cities of refuge. Included also were the pasture lands necessary to support the community. Each of the twelve tribes gave up approximately four cities together with pasture lands to support the Levites. The idea of allotment emphasized that it was the Lord who assigned these places. The family of Aaron was given the land closest to Jerusalem so they would be near the temple. We also see that the Levites were not timid in asking Joshua to fulfill the promise of Moses, even as Caleb did in chapter 14.

What is significant about these cities? We read in Josh. 13:33: "But to the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them."

How would you feel if you were part of this tribe, knowing that every other tribe had an inheritance except yours? You might think that somehow you had missed out, that your family was forever cursed because of something Levi had done. But, even though the tribe of Levi had no physical inheritance they had an inheritance in the Lord; and in the end, that inheritance was more precious than that of all the other tribes. What Levi received came from God, the owner of the land. God gave to Levi the tithe that he received from all the other tribes. So what at first appeared to be a curse actually became a blessing. The Levites were given a special role, the task of the priestly duties. Their job was to teach the law that sanctified, blessed and secured God's people in the land. Moses, Eleazar, Phineas, Ezra, and John the Baptist were all Levites. Thus, Levi's inheritance was in the Lord.

What a great encouragement this is for us! Daily we suffer the consequences of our sin. At times we feel we have missed out on an inheritance, a blessing. We feel that we will have to pay for our sins or the sins of our fathers and mothers forever. But in the tribe of Levi we see that God can turn our curses into blessings. We can still be used by him. We don't require a physical blessing. We don't have to live feeling that we missed out, that we are forever second-rate, living without any hope or direction, always downcast and regretful, because our inheritance is always in the Lord.

David, the great king of Israel who had wealth and land and cities, learned that there was nothing more beautiful to him than this inheritance, as Psalm 16 declares:

The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup;
Thou dost support my lot.
The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places;
Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me (Ps. 16:5-6).

On a personal note, I can relate to the tribe of Levi. Looking back over the years, I see a greatly wasted youth and squandered resources. I have often said that I probably sinned more in one weekend than most of you have done in your lifetime. And yet God has given me the privilege to study and teach his Word. What a tremendous blessing that is to me! And what a responsibility too! God has given me something that is so much better than anything I could have hoped for.

Of course, as Christians, all of us are Levites, really. We have our inheritance in the Lord. We are part of the holy priesthood. We have been given the Word to know and impart to others. So, if you think that you have forever missed out, consider the tribe of Levi. Don't allow self-pity to drown out the voice of God. Come to him and ask for your inheritance, even as Levi. The Lord wants you to have your inheritance in his city. Washington Irving said, "It lightens the stroke to draw near to him who handles the rod." God will use you. He will even use your sin. For him, nothing is wasted. So draw near and experience the beauty of your heritage.

I delight in the images which these cities portray for us as Christians. They are snapshots of grace, grace in city gates. My prayer is that they will be engraved into the very fabric of our lives.

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (Heb. 10:19-23).

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WHEN BROTHERS ARE AT ODDS

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

Catalog No. 1169

Joshua 22:1-34

16th Message

John Hanneman

February 7th, 1999

When disputes arise among people, my natural inclination is to run for cover. I try to avoid contention and confrontation. I love a good fight, but I don't want to be in the middle of one. No matter how hard I try, however, I have found there is no way to avoid disagreements, disputes and misunderstandings. What should we do when Christian relationships go askew? How should we respond when believers are at odds?

The book of Joshua recounts the story of the Israelites' conquering and subsequent occupation and life in the land. As we have already seen, living in the land is analogous to the believer's life in Christ. But life in the land is anything but a Camelot-like experience. It has its struggles. One problem that arises at times is fractured relationships, schisms and divisions. While we agree with the words of the psalm, "It is good and pleasant for brothers to dwell in unity" (Ps. 133:1), there is always potential for conflict. We need to be prepared to handle these situations, because they will inevitably arise.

By the end of the twenty-first chapter of Joshua, the conquest of the land is complete. It has been both conquered and divided. Listen to these words, from 21:43-45:

"So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers...And the LORD gave them rest on every side...Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass." (NASB)

We come now to the last three chapters of the book, covering the subjects of retaining and maintaining the land. All three of these chapters relate to some aspect of worship. As we have already noted, this book is, in a sense, a "photo album" made up of snapshots of warfare and worship. Here we find that worship is key to retaining the land, just as we saw it was key to taking the land.

Chapter 22 opens with a farewell address by Joshua to the two and one-half tribes who took their inheritance east of the Jordan but later crossed over to help their brothers drive out their enemies. Now that the enemies have been defeated, these eastern tribes are free to return to their homes.

This must have been an emotional scene, as brothers who had been comrades-in-arms for seven years said good-bye to one another. Those of you who are veterans know how emotional saying farewell to your comrades can be. Here, Joshua makes a speech praising these brothers for their faithfulness and exhorting them to maintain covenant loyalty in the future. In essence, he repeats to them what he had said to Israel in chapter 1, before the conquest of the land.

Joshua tells these tribes to "keep on keeping on." What a great word this is, both for Israel and for us! We are to live

with the same vigilance in peacetime as in wartime. But, unfortunately, we tend to let things slide once the pressure of battle is over and there is clear sailing ahead. If we don't maintain our spiritual life, however, we are asking for trouble.

As we come to our text we find that matters become heated over the building of an altar. Chapter 22:9-10:

And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home and departed from the sons of Israel at Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession which they had possessed, according to the command of the LORD through Moses.

And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance.

As the eastern tribes cross into their own land they build a large altar at the Jordan. It is unclear as to exactly where this was erected, but the text says it was a very large and very visible edifice.

The altar was to create a huge problem, as we will see. Verses 11-12:

And the sons of Israel heard it said, "Behold, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, on the side belonging to the sons of Israel." And when the sons of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the sons of Israel gathered themselves at Shiloh, to go up against them in war.

When the western tribes hear the news about the altar, they begin to prepare for war. They responded in this manner because the book of Deuteronomy expressly forbade the building of any altar other than the main altar for the offering of sacrifices designated by the Lord:

"When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, then it shall come about that the place in which the LORD your God shall choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD...Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every cultic place you see, but in the place which the LORD chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you" (Deut. 12:10-14).

Worship in Israel, therefore, could take place only at the central sanctuary, which was at Shiloh. It was an act of apostasy to offer sacrifices on any other altar. The issue here is doctrinal and scriptural in nature. This was anything but a personality conflict. The western tribes thought that this was a rival altar, and they took that very seriously.

They respond by selecting a delegation. Verses 13-14:

Then the sons of Israel sent to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, one chief for each father's household from each of the tribes of Israel; and each one of them was the head of his father's household among the thousands of Israel.

These men are selected and sent to confront the situation. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, already has a good track record. Ten tribal heads are selected, one chief from each tribe.

The delegation confronts these eastern brothers with a number of harsh accusations. Verses 15-20:

And they came to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them saying, "Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, 'What is this unfaithful act which you have committed against the God of Israel, turning away from following the LORD this day, by building yourselves an altar, to rebel against the LORD this day? Is not the iniquity of Peor enough for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves to this day, although a plague came on the congregation of the LORD, that you must turn away this day from following the LORD? And it will come about if you rebel against the LORD today, that He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow. If, however, the land of your possession is unclean, then cross into the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD, or rebel against us by building an altar for yourselves, besides the altar of the LORD our God. Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully in the things under the ban, and wrath fall on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity.'"

The western emissaries make an accusation to the eastern tribes, setting out the seriousness of the issue at hand. They call the building of the altar an unfaithful act—an act of rebellion. The term "unfaithful act" means to commit a trespass against the Lord. This is the word that was used to describe Achan's sin, in chapter 7. The word "rebel," meaning, to nullify or break a covenant, is used more times in Joshua than any other Old Testament book. The reason this issue was regarded so seriously was that Israel had suffered on previous occasions when someone in the community had acted unfaithfully against God.

The delegation cites two such cases: the iniquity of Peor, and the sin of Achan. In chapter 7 we saw that the sin of Achan led to the defeat at Ai and the death of many of Israelites. The iniquity of Peor refers to an incident recorded in Num. 25, when some Israelites, led by the daughters of Moab, were seduced into idolatry with the deity, Baal-

Peor. Specifically, Zimri took a Midianite woman to be his wife. As a result of his sin, 24,000 Israelites died of a plague which was not checked until Phinehas put a spear through both Zimri and his wife as they lay together. Phinehas seems to indicate that the seeds of this idolatry still remained and that Israel has not purified themselves of this sin.

What the western tribes are attempting to do in this confrontation is avoid the wrath of God. They are aware that the actions of one person could affect the entire nation. We never sin in a vacuum. Our sin always affects others. A man does not "perish alone in his iniquity."

The eastern tribes respond to the delegation by emphatically denying the accusations. Verses 21-23:

Then the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered, and spoke to the heads of the families of Israel. "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, the Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows, and may Israel itself know. If it was in rebellion, or if in an unfaithful act against the LORD do not Thou save us this day! If we have built us an altar to turn away from following the LORD, or if to offer a burnt offering or grain offering on it, or if to offer sacrifices of peace offerings on it, may the LORD Himself require it."

The eastern tribes reply with astonishing directness, making their appeal to God, and declaring they would welcome destruction if they had acted unfaithfully. In other words, they agree with the importance of the issue, the truth of the Word, and the consequences of disobedience.

They go on to explain their reasons for building the altar. Verses 24-28:

"But truly we have done this out of concern, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your sons may say to our sons, "What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between us and you, you sons of Reuben and sons of Gad; you have no portion in the LORD." So your sons may make our sons stop fearing the LORD.'

"Therefore we said, 'Let us build an altar, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it shall be a witness between us and you and between our generations after us, that we are to perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings, that your sons may not say to our sons in time to come, "You have no portion in the LORD." Therefore we said, 'It shall also come about if they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, then we shall say, "See the copy of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it is a witness between us and you.'"

Here we come the center-point of the story. The eastern tribes explain the purpose of the altar, saying it was not intended to be functional, but, rather, a memorial to the altar at Shiloh. It was not meant to mark division but, on the contrary, union among the twelve tribes. They had erected the altar so that in the future, the tribes west of the Jordan would not forget about their relationship with the tribes east of the river. The altar was intended to be a witness to an ongoing relationship, so that the eastern tribes would be able to come into the land and worship at the proper

place in the proper way. It was a copy that pointed to the real thing.

In verse 29, the accusations are denied; and in verses 30-31, they are retracted. The delegation returns to Shiloh (v. 32), and war is avoided (33).

Finally, the altar is named. Verse 34:

And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar Witness; "For," they said, "it is a witness between us that the LORD is God."

An interesting footnote here is that this story relates to two other stories in the Bible. First, it closely parallels an event that occurred between Jacob and Laban when Jacob and his wives left Laban. The men had a dispute concerning stolen idols, and they ended up erecting a heap of stones on the border of their lands as a witness between them that they would not pass over the border with the intention of harming one another.

Second, we are reminded of another event that took place at the Jordan river, the occasion when John the Baptist appeared, preaching a baptism of repentance. John kept deflecting the light away from himself, pointing to Another who was coming. He was not the sacrifice, and the Jordan was not the altar. Rather, he was a copy, pointing to the true Sacrifice that would be offered on the altar of God. God wanted the purity and the sanctity of the altar to remain so that the altar of the cross could be clearly understood.

At times, we will not be able to avoid situations where we find ourselves at odds with brothers and sisters in Christ. For instance, when I was beginning my ministry with our singles a number of years ago, my first official act was to cancel an appearance by a speaker because of his stand on sexual relations prior to marriage. Our elders have had to confront difficult issues over the years. Many of you have suffered through painful church splits and divisions over doctrinal differences, sin, misunderstanding, and poor communication. The results of these things can be devastating to the body of Christ.

In this story in Joshua we recognize a number of guidelines setting out how to deal with such circumstances. Technically speaking, these guidelines apply to a biblical, sin issue; however, several of them will be helpful in dealing with differences of any kind, whether they occur in the church body, the home or the office.

The first thing we see is this: Be forthright.

Notice that the problem was squarely addressed. There was no attempt to sweep it under the rug. The text says, "All of the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled at Shiloh" (22:12) to discuss the situation. This runs counter to our natural inclination to ignore problems, hoping they will go away. When a difficulty such as this arises, however, the first thing we need to do is face up to it, not shrink from it. The sooner we deal with it, the better.

Secondly: Assess the seriousness of the matter appropriately.

In this instance, the potential apostasy was taken so seriously the western tribes were willing to place purity above their own very lives. They would not settle for peace at any price. They were willing to go to war against brothers they dearly loved. There was no resentment or long-

standing feud. Their willingness to go to war was the correct reaction, according to the law. When a city of brothers fell into idolatry, Israel was instructed in Deuteronomy to "strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword" (Deut. 13:15).

Issues of sin demand an appropriate, serious response. Sin in the camp can affect the entire body, as we saw with Achan and the iniquity at Peor. In the N.T., Paul instructed Timothy to not lay hands on new elders too quickly, because of the risk in the sharing of some sin issue. When there is a clear violation of God's Word we need to be serious in our response. But, when there is not a clear sin issue we must evaluate the appropriate seriousness of the matter, based on the Word, and communicate that clearly.

Third: Send the right people.

The western tribes sent their ablest leaders to deal with the problem. They dispatched Phinehas, who had been zealous for the Lord at Baal Peor (Num. 25:7) and ten chiefs, selected from all the tribes, to engage in some straight talk with the eastern tribes.

This is one of the most difficult problems we face in dealing with disagreements. Differences create anxiety, so we tend to delegate our responsibility: We send our secretary or we dispatch an e-mail. We talk to others but fail to confront face to face those directly involved. We hold too many mini-meetings and the issue gets clouded and jumbled, making matters worse. It is extremely important to get all the right people together and talk face to face. Don't send your secretary or someone else to deal with the situation that demands your personal involvement.

Fourth: Focus on the issue.

The delegation from the western tribes was honest and objective. They didn't beat around the bush, but clearly identified the issue as one that concerned the breaking of God's commandment. It was a matter of a breach of faith, an act of rebellion against God, not a subjective attack based on egos or personalities.

When we face sin issues and differences it is imperative that we focus objectively on the matter at hand. This is not an easy task. We can end up getting emotionally entangled when we are dealing with troublesome issues. Self-worth, identity, ego and pride cloud things. We create an emotional web to hide our fears and anxieties, and people get hurt in the process. What we must do is deal with the facts in an objective manner. Matthew exhorts: "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (Matt. 18:15-16).

Fifth: Offer assistance and support to win your brother.

The western tribes respected their brothers' consciences as to the cleanness of the land and were willing to offer some of their own land to restore them. What an offer! In making it, what they were saying was, "We understand the problem. If your land is defiled, and if the traditions in your land are causing you to commit apostasy, then we will give you some of our land." What a demonstration of costly love!

This is the kind of love that wins people to God. This is the love that restores peace and unity among believers. Truth is important, but we need both truth and love. When we practice discipline and confront a brother or a sister we can do this in a self-righteous way that exalts ourselves and drives people away. But if our concern is truly for the brother or the sister, and their relationship to God, then we will offer our own time and money in order to maintain the purity of the brethren.

Paul exhibited this kind of love when he dealt with the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols, in Corinth. He said that all food was clean and edible. However, certain weaker brothers did not have the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, and if the stronger brothers ate in their presence, it might cause them to stumble. Paul's advice was, "Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13). Speaking to the same issue in Romans, the apostle wrote, "So then let us pursue the things which make for the peace and the building up of one another ... Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves" (Rom. 14:19; 15:1).

Are we willing to do as Paul says? Are we willing to offer our couch to someone to sleep on so that he or she might be released from an immoral living situation? Are we willing to offer financial help to someone caught in an unethical use of money? It's easy to blast away and condemn, but much harder to be part of the solution.

Sixth: Maintain an open mind.

The western tribes were concerned about what they viewed as apostasy. However, once they understood the motives of the eastern tribes they were not afraid to accept this new expression of faith that could be helpful in maintaining covenant loyalty and brotherhood; so the altar remained in place.

Our tendency is to get locked into an "us versus them" mentality. We think our side has to win. However, if we are dealing with the facts, and if our goal is not to win at all costs, if we can keep an open mind, if we can make the effort to listen, there may be an alternative solution, one that will maintain purity, integrity, and brotherhood.

Seventh: Offer praise and thanksgiving to God.

When the western tribes heard the explanation offered for the building of the altar, they gave thanks that God was in their midst and he had delivered them. Then, when they returned and gave the report to the congregation, the sons of Israel blessed God.

It is not a pleasant thing when relationships go awry. But when they do, and when matters are reconciled at last, don't hush things up and pretend there was never a problem to begin with. Allow these situations to be an occasion for rejoicing, praise, and worship. Share what happened,

and then bless the Lord together. Once things have been worked out, this can result in greater intimacy and oneness in the family of God.

In this story we have a wonderful example of brothers maintaining the purity of truth but also acting in love. Both of these elements are necessary, but they must be held in balance. Christians are called to confront sin, wickedness and evil with the truth of God. But we must never act in a self-righteous manner. We are servants of God, called to love others with the love of Christ, but sin and evil are hurtful to God and to the body of Christ. Let us be so concerned for purity that we are willing to give of our time and our possessions to bring brothers and sisters back in line with the truth of God.

Perhaps you are involved in just such a situation. If you are, God is calling on you to act in a forthright manner. Perhaps he is calling you to reach out to a brother or sister caught in sin, or to shun your pride and give up your demands so that you can save another through an act of costly love. Is God speaking to your heart this morning? If he is, I encourage you to be obedient to his voice.

As members of the body of Christ then, let us face up to difficult situations, remembering that our joy in knowing him and being used by him brings him joy. As we conclude, let us allow the words of Scripture to wash our wounds and bring healing where it is needed.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity (Ps. 133:1).

...being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering (Matt. 5:23-24).

And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity (Col. 3:14).

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

Lovingkindness and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other (Ps. 85:10).

May these words be said of us as we seek to do the Lord's will when disagreements arise among the brethren.

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Joshua 23:1-16

17th Message

John Hanneman

February 14th, 1999

As a society we are very adept at self-preservation. We have car alarms, smoke alarms and home alarms. We have dead bolts on our doors. We have "The Club" to protect our cars. We carry home, automobile, health and life insurance. We are diligent to get physical examinations and flu shots. We visit health clubs and watch work-out videos. We have air bags and bicycle helmets. We have antibiotics, antidepressants and antioxidants. We have anti-virus software and secure browsers. We have 403b's and 401k's that we chart daily on the Web. Our bank accounts are federally insured. We have registered, certified and insured mail. We have caller ID, *69, 911, and call blocking. We guard our physical lives and our possessions with dogged tenacity. But what about our souls? Do we guard them with the same diligence and fervency as our possessions?

In the final chapters of the book of Joshua we will look at two farewell addresses by Joshua to the people of Israel. These two speeches are similar to his farewell address to the two and one-half tribes whose inheritance lay east of the Jordan (chapter 22). They are also similar to the words which the Lord spoke to Joshua in chapter 1. Their central themes are worship and covenant loyalty. Every word and phrase comes right out of the book of Deuteronomy. These are not new words and new ideas. They are old words and old truths that need constant repetition, sentiments that are designed to protect, preserve and safeguard the soul. Though the land had been conquered and possessed, danger still lurked. This is a word for Christians, too. The fact that we have come to Christ doesn't mean that we can coast along and fail to guard our spiritual life.

In the opening verses of chapter 23, Joshua introduces the thoughts he wants to leave with the Israelites:

Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years, that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers, and said to them, "I am old, advanced in years. And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has been fighting for you. See, I have apportioned to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes, with all the nations which I have cut off, from the Jordan even to the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun. And the LORD your God, He shall thrust them out from before you and drive them from before you; and you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you." (Josh. 23:1-5, NASB)

These are Joshua's parting words, his last will and testament to the nation as he passes the torch onto the next generation. His address is similar to that given by Moses (Deut. 31:1-13), Samuel (1 Sam. 12:1-24), and David (1 Kgs.

2:1-9). Both Moses and Joshua had kept faith up to the time of their death, therefore they were models for the next generation (2 Tim. 3:10-4:6; 2 Pet. 1:12-21). What a wonderful scene this was, as Joshua summoned the leaders and the people of Israel to hear his last words to them.

Some years ago I was among a group of PBC interns who spent a day visiting with Bob Smith, one of the founders of the church. Bob shared with us about his relationship with God and the principles of Christian ministry. I remember how blessed I felt to sit at the feet of this godly man who was leaving such a great legacy for us to follow. I imagine that this occasion when Joshua spoke to the Israelites was similar in tone.

As he begins his address, Joshua recalls God's past faithfulness to Israel, how God had driven out the nations who had inhabited the land of Canaan. Joshua reminds the people that they did not win these battles on their own. The Lord had fought for Israel, and now he had given them rest from all their enemies, as he had promised Joshua in chapter 1.

Certain work still remained to be done, however. Pockets of enemies still remained in the land. As each tribe went to possess their allotted territory they were responsible to continue what Joshua had begun, driving out the nations that remained. To fully possess the land, Israel must continue to dispossess these enemies. The words "drive out" and "possess," in verse 5, come from the same Hebrew word. Dispossess and possess are two sides of the same coin. In order to possess, one must first dispossess. Joshua tells the new generation that while he has had great success, now they must continue the fight. And, of course, God promised to be with them to fight for them.

Why didn't Joshua knock out all the enemies in the land? you ask. Why did Israel have to battle those that remained? The answer is that each generation had to learn how to battle. Each generation had to learn faith in the God who fought for Israel. It is no different in the church. Each generation has to engage in the battle between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world, the war between the spirit and the flesh. Each believer who has entered into life in Christ has to heed the call and enter into this battle. Faith is not inherited. We learn much from the godly men and women who have gone before us, but there will come a time when each of us must face the battle and learn that God will fight for us as well and dispossess our enemies. Nobody can do it for us.

This is a great lesson for me in ministry, because my tendency is to try to fix people's problems. I can't do that, of course, no one can, and I shouldn't try to, either. What a great truth this is for parents, too! We must release our children so they can fight their own battles and resist rushing in to take care of things for them. Last Saturday night I

got a telephone call from my son, telling me his car had broken down outside Santa Barbara. My usual response would be to tell him I'd be right there to help him solve the problem. And that's what I wanted to do, but I could not. But it was a good lesson for him to handle that problem himself. Each of us must either stand or fall, but stand we will, because we are in Christ and it is he who fights for us.

What will it take for the next generation of Israel to enjoy success in defeating the nations that remain? Joshua's answer is, covenant loyalty. As their spiritual life goes, so will go Israel's efforts in dispossessing the enemy.

In verses 6-11 now, Joshua impresses upon the nation three phrases to safeguard their souls.

The first phrase is this: Be strong to guard and to obey the word. Verses 6-7:

“Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, in order that you may not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them.”

The phrase literally reads, “be strong to guard and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses.” This word “strong” is the same term that is used in the oft repeated phrase in Joshua, “be strong and courageous.” “Keep” means to guard or watch over; the root idea is to “exercise great care over.” This is the key word in Joshua's farewell address, in chapter 22, and it is key here as well. It is used in reference to covenant obligations, laws and statutes. But it is also used of keeping a garden, a flock, a house and guarding against intruders. The first way we safeguard our soul is to guard the word: to meditate on it and obey it. Scripture says, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet” (Ps. 119:105). Let us be diligent to guard it with care.

Why are we instructed to do this? Joshua warns Israel that if they turn their gaze from the word and associate (go in) with the other nations (inter-marry with them), then they will begin to bow down to their gods. They will swear vows by them and serve them. In other words, they will begin to worship idols. But the word guards our souls from such idolatry. Notice that the purpose for the word is not so that we might feel better about ourselves. It is not given to please our parents or to earn God's approval. It is given for our preservation. We are to guard the word and to do it so that we will not be influenced by the world and fall into idolatry. The word is a compass that keeps us on the right course, directing our path so that we will not get lost. It teaches us about how we are to live in a way that is pleasing to God. What a blessing we have in the word of God! Without it we would be clueless about how we are to live. This is why we are to meditate on the word day and night.

Henri Nouwen has a good word for us here. He writes:

Reading the scriptures is not as easy as it seems since in our academic world we tend to make anything and everything we read subject to analysis and discussion. But the word of God should lead us first of all to contemplation and meditation. Instead of taking the words apart, we should bring them together in our innermost

being. Instead of wondering if we agree or disagree, we should wonder which words are directly spoken to us and connect directly with our most personal story. Instead of thinking about the words as potential subjects for an interesting dialogue or paper, we should be willing to let them penetrate into the most hidden corners of our heart, even to those places where no other word has yet found entrance. Then and only then can the word bear fruit as seed sown in rich soil. Only then can we really “hear and understand” (*Reaching Out*, 35-36).

So the first instruction for Israel is that they are to be strong to guard the word and obey it.

The second is: Cling to the Lord your God.

“But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. For the LORD has driven out great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day. One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you.” (23:8-10)

Joshua's second phrase is, “cling to the Lord.” The word means to cleave, to adhere. It is the same word that is used in Genesis 2 in reference to marriage, when “a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (2:24). Our relationship with God is like that: it is a one-flesh relationship, a deeply complex, mysterious union in which our life and Christ's life are inextricably joined together. So we are to cultivate oneness with God as we would with a spouse.

Why are we to cling to God? Because God fights for his people. Notice Joshua's words, “The LORD has dispossessed great and strong nations from before you...no man has stood before you to this day. One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you.” If we do not cling to God we will be easy pickings for our enemies. We will be defenseless against them. We will be cut off from our spiritual resources and we will seek strength from other allies. We must cultivate our union with God because he is our strength, our refuge, shelter, and protector.

And how do we cling to God? In the same way that we cultivate oneness in marriage: we must spend time with God. We must talk to him and listen to him. We must spend time in quiet and solitude. In the dark night of the soul we must reach out and grasp hold of him and him alone.

When my children were little, at bedtime they would call out, “Taxi!” and wrap themselves around my legs, wanting to be dragged to their bedrooms. Nothing could make them release their grip on me. This is how we are to cling to God. T. S. Eliot wrote: “It's bad tonight, my nerves are shattered. Just talk to me. I'll make it through the night.” That is clinging to God and looking for deliverance from him and him alone.

Joshua's third phrase is: Guard your soul to love God.

“So take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God.” (23:11)

Joshua urges the people, “Take diligent heed to yourselves to love the LORD your God.” Literally, this phrase reads, “so you must guard greatly your souls to love Yah-

weh your God.” The word “guard” is the same word as in verse 6. “Love” is another word that speaks of a marriage relationship. There is a progression in the text as we move deeper and deeper into our heart, from obedience, to union, to love.

Loving God is our highest calling. This is the very essence of the law: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4-5). Loving God in your heart means much more than merely behaving correctly and doing the right thing, however. Our relationship with God is not held together by duty, contracts or rules. It is a relationship that is bound by commitment, passion and wild abandonment of ourselves to another. This is how God loves us—and his greatest joy is for us to love him in the same way. Augustine said, “There can only be two basic loves, the love of God unto the forgetfulness of self, or the love of self unto the forgetfulness and denial of God.”

The question we are forced to ask is not whether we know God or believe in him, but, rather, do we love him? Do we love him more than our spouse, success, degrees, possessions or jobs? Do we love him more than life itself? Do we love him in spite of disappointments and heartache? That is the question that Jesus put to Peter and it is the question that he asks us, too. Will we guard this love with as much care as we guard our house, our car, our children? To be a disciple of Jesus means that we take up our cross daily, denying ourselves and following him out of devotion and love. St. John of the Cross said, “At the evening of our day we shall be judged by our loving.” Do we truly love God?

What is really beyond comprehension is that we have the capacity, the opportunity and the possibility to be in a love relationship with God because of the cross of Christ. This God who is the Creator of the universe, the redeemer of mankind, the one who controls every event of every day throughout the world, wants us to love him freely. That is his greatest joy. How privileged we are!

We have been given a wonderful gift then, life in Christ. In him, God delivers us from the world, defeating fortified enemies in miraculous ways. But this life of faith does not run on automatic. We can't program a timer that turns on a spiritual sprinkler to water our soul for ten minutes every morning. There are still enemies remaining that would keep us from possessing this life fully: the flesh, sinful habits, misplaced love, idols. To keep us from the influence of these things we need to give great care to our spiritual life, as Joshua instructs: guarding, doing, clinging, loving. Whether at war or rest, we must guard our soul.

When my wife was getting ready to travel to Guatemala recently to visit the faith project that we are involved in down there, our daughter Annie put together a care package of her favorite treats for her. Included in the basket was a Bible in which Annie had included a morning devotional for each day of the week. These were hand written letters, personal words of encouragement, to guard her mother's soul. How gratifying that was to Liz! In the word of God we have a priceless possession, hand written letters to each one of personally. Let us not fail to cultivate it and cherish it.

What will happen to Israel if they do not safeguard their

soul? In this closing section, Joshua warns the nation, using very sobering words. If they can't be motivated by love, then perhaps they will be motivated by fear.

Verses 12-13:

“For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.”

Joshua cautions Israel against returning and clinging to the nations remaining in the land. The action of clinging (verse 12) is matched with verse 8. If you cling to the Lord, he will fight for you. However, if you do not, but choose instead to cling to others, then God will not drive out these enemies. Inter-marriage is the concern here; it is not a matter of racial or ethnic identity. If Israel inter-married with the nations around them, the less demanding standard would prevail and they would end up worshipping false gods.

This is always the concern when Christians marry non-believers. It is one of the primary ways that Satan attacks the church and destroys the purity of the soul. When one becomes a Christian, it is almost certain that there will be an enticing but unedifying love relationship waiting around the corner.

The results of idolatry are drastic. God will not dispossess the enemy but, rather, will allow him to remain as a source of constant frustration. Joshua makes use of four metaphors to describe how these enemies would function in the lives of the people.

First, they would become a “snare.” This word refers to a bird trap. It is used figuratively of ensnaring for calamities and plots (Hos. 5:1; Amos 3:5).

Second, a “trap” is a bait or lure in a fowler's net. The word is used figuratively for what allures and entraps one, leading to disaster and ruin. It is that which allures one from his real purpose and then destroys him (Exod. 23:33; Deut. 7:16; Judg. 2:3; 8:27; Ps. 106:36; alliances with Canaanites Exod. 34:12). “And you shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you” (Deut. 7:16).

The third metaphor is, a “whip on your sides.” A whip is a scourge for chastisement. In Prov. 26:3 it is likened to a rod for the back of fools. Joshua is saying that the enemies that remained would become a rod of discipline to be used by God against Israel.

And fourth, these nations would become for Israel a “thorn in your eyes.” A “thorn” is a prick or barb. The remaining nations would be a constant source of irritation, like a particle of dirt in the eye. “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land in which you live” (Num. 33:55).

The principle is that if we do not drive out the enemies in the land, which, for believers, is associated with the deeds of the flesh and attachments to the world, then the sins and habits of our flesh and the associated consequences will haunt us for the rest of our lives. If we allow them to live, God will no longer drive them out. The things that we love more than God, the things that we cling to and depend on will end up enslaving us and will be the cause of constant frustration and trouble.

One cannot be neutral in the battle between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world. Either the saint or the sinner must prevail. The one who is not for Christ is against him. A desire for peaceful coexistence will not cut it. The uncommitted will be destroyed. There is a point when God abandons sinners to their wicked desires. If we do not use the truth that God has given to us we will lose it and we will be overrun by the enemy.

How certain is this? Look at verse 14.

“Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.”

To drive home the truth of these principles, Joshua reminds Israel that God will fulfill his word. The nation is already keenly aware that not one good word which the Lord has spoken has failed to come to pass, therefore, they can be assured that not one evil word will fail, either. If God's people guard the word to do it there will be blessing, but if they break covenant loyalty, then God's anger will burn against them. This is exactly what happened to Israel, and this is what will happen to us, too, if we fail to guard the word to do it.

God is not capricious. We do not have to live in anxiety. We know exactly what will happen. We cannot say that we were unaware of the consequences of wrongful actions. We are fully informed. God speaks clearly both promises to inspire love and threats to provoke fear. If we obey we will be blessed; if we disobey we will suffer the consequences. As Paul said, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap”

(Gal. 6:7). What a sobering word this is for young people, especially! Start loving the Lord early in life. You will never regret your decision.

When we look at this passage objectively, we must readily admit that it is an absurd thing to exchange the love of God for the worship of an idol, and yet we know from experience that it is hard to guard our spiritual life. Let us therefore remember two things.

First, we must recognize and acknowledge how vulnerable we are to idolatry. This is the implication of our text. We are easily seduced to worship and serve other gods. At times we will be severely tempted to love someone or something more than God. This is God's greatest heartache, because he is a jealous husband. We are in a marriage relationship with him, but worshipping idols is akin to having an adulterous affair. And the same thing that is true of marriage is true of our love relationship with God. If we think we are safe, if we think for one moment that we can coast, that we are invulnerable, then we are in the most dangerous position of all. The best way to keep either a marriage or the spiritual life pure is to know how vulnerable we are and live in constant recognition of that fact.

Second, we need to assess the value of our soul. Jesus asked, “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:25). Jesus implies that our soul is worth more than all the riches of the world. If the world places a value of three million dollars on a baseball (Mark McGwire's 70th home run ball), what value can we place on something that is priceless? Abraham Heschel said, “Our life is not our own property but a possession of God. And it is this divine ownership that makes life a sacred thing.” When we realize the value of our spiritual life, then we will give it the care and attention it needs. We will center ourselves on Jesus every day. We will guard our souls, resolving by his grace to obey him, to cling to him, and love him.

If every thought we ponder, every conversation we engage in, and every action we take arises out of our love for God and our devotion to him, everything else will be fine. May God grant that we will place loving God and serving him before everything else in life.

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“AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE...”

SERIES: IMAGES OF WARFARE AND WORSHIP

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Joshua 24:1-33

18th Message

John Hanneman

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Everyone is destined to worship and serve a god. Recently I saw the movie *Everest* at the San Jose Tech. Museum. I learned that when climbers reach the top of Everest, they leave a memorial on the summit as a tribute to the “gods” of the world’s tallest mountain for making conditions favorable for the climb. There seems to be a feeling among climbers that without the gods working on their behalf, their climb would not be successful. There is no doubt that each of us will serve some kind of god. The only question is, which one will we serve?

Today we come to our final study in Joshua. As we have seen in earlier studies in this book, Israel has accomplished an amazing series of victories in battle, defeating 31 kings in the seven-year conquest of the land of Canaan. Now, before each tribe is dismissed to its inheritance, it’s time to express gratitude to God, to worship him and erect another memorial. Thus, Joshua gathers Israel together on one last occasion for the purpose of worship and covenant renewal. Even though this gathering is similar to the occasions we have already looked at in chapters 22 and 23, this coming together is a final, grand ceremony to climax the conquest of the land.

Joshua 24:1:

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God. (NASB)

This is actually the fourth time in Israel’s history that the covenant between God and Israel is ratified and renewed. It had already been renewed at Mt. Sinai, following the exodus (Exodus 24); at Moab, after God had preserved Israel in the desert and defeated enemies east of the Jordan (Deut. 29:1); at Mt. Ebal, following the victories at Jericho and Ai (Josh. 8:30-34); and now on this occasion, following the conquest of the land. The first two of these covenant renewal ceremonies were mediated through Moses, and the last two through Joshua.

Shechem is the place where Joshua assembles the nation. There they present themselves before God, i.e., before the ark of the covenant. Shechem was a holy place. It was the site of the covenant ceremony of chapter 8. Abram built an altar there (Gen. 12:6-7). In fact, Shechem was the first place that was named in the Promised Land. That was where Jacob purchased land and built an altar (Gen. 33:18-20); and it was there, under

the oak of Moreh, where Jacob buried foreign idols (Gen. 35:1-4).

This chapter describes a formal covenant ceremony. The structure of the text follows closely what was known as an Ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty between a superpower and a weaker nation. These treaties had six parts: a preamble identifying the king; a historical prologue reciting the king’s kindnesses to the vassal nation; certain stipulations (the most important of which was an undertaking to serve only the king and his kingdom); curses and blessings; witnesses, and the deposit of the treaty document. All of these are represented in the text. God is the King of the land, and he is signing off on a vassal treaty, a covenant with his people Israel.

In our day we might not appreciate fully the scene that is laid out here. Perhaps we will be helped by remembering that we preserve the memory of certain historical events like the signing of the Declaration of Independence, marking such great occasions with monuments and holidays. This ceremony in chapter 24 marks just such an occasion for Israel and their God. Both the form and the place of the renewal indicate that this is an extremely important occasion. This event and the words spoken here are to be remembered forever in the history of God’s people.

Following the preamble in verse 1, a lengthy prologue sets out the kindnesses of Yahweh toward the people of Israel, beginning with Abraham’s call from beyond the Euphrates and concluding with the conquest of the land. Notice the references to Isaac, Jacob and Esau; the deliverance from Egypt; the wilderness experience; Balaam’s forced blessing, and the victories over the nations in the land. This is a time span of over six hundred years. In short, this is Israel’s history, Israel’s story.

Let us read what Joshua said. Verse 2:

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued

Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out. And I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. But when they cried out to the LORD, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness for a long time. Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you. Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand. And you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand. Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow. And I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.’ (24:2-13)

Notice that on twenty occasions in these verses the subject is God. God is quoted as saying, “I took. I brought. I made his seed many. I gave. I sent. I struck. I delivered.” On three occasions the word “He” refers to God. Six times God “gave”; five times God “brought into” or “out of.” The word “you” is used in only five phrases.

The point is obvious. Israel has been blessed because of the gracious acts of her King, not by means of her own strength, but because God fought for her: “not with your sword and not with your bow.” God doesn’t remind Israel of their supposed illustrious ancestry. On the contrary, he reminds them of their humble and utterly pagan beginnings and his own great acts of salvation. This is what Hannah sang about in 1 Samuel:

“He keeps the feet of His godly ones,
But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;
For not by might shall a man prevail” (1 Sam 2:9).

Just like Israel, every believer has a story, an adventure that is fixed in time and marked by dramatic events. Our personal stories are an extremely important aspect of our spiritual life. And they are important to God, because he is their author and director. We should take care to preserve our stories as a means to cultivate covenant loyalty. But it is imperative that we see them in a larger context so that our personal histories do not become an end in themselves.

Let me explain. We can tell our story in many different ways. For example, we can make ourselves the victim or we can use our background to manipulate people, elicit sympathy or justify our selfish actions. But our story does us no good if it remains an island unto itself. It becomes powerful only when we connect it to the greater story of redemption, when we build bridges from our journey to Christ’s journey and change the subject from ourselves to God. Our story should be about what God has done and is presently doing with us; its goal should be to enhance covenant loyalty for ourselves and others.

We find the New Testament parallel to Israel’s story in Ephesians 2:1-6. Paul’s says: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.” After all our wandering, God has brought us into the land, giving us cities we did not build and vineyards we did not plant. He has defeated our enemies, giving us rest in Christ.

Do you know how your story connects to the Christ story? Is God the subject of your story? Perhaps it would be helpful to write down your salvation history. Make it a practice whenever you gather over a meal to give someone a stage to share their story. Our spiritual story is an important part of covenant loyalty.

Based upon God’s benevolent acts of kindness to Israel, what does he now ask Israel to do? Verses 14-18:

“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

And the people answered and said, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. And the LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve

the LORD, for He is our God.” (24:14-18)

God presents his people with three covenant obligations: They were to fear the Lord, they were serve him, and put away the gods they formerly served. The fact that they were to completely remove all foreign idols seems to indicate they still retained some of these practices which they had brought with them from Egypt, or even earlier. Now that God has brought Israel into the land, he demands that they completely remove their idols and serve him and him alone.

The key word in the text is the word “serve,” meaning, to work, worship, perform. Our work and our worship are closely connected. Whatever we give ourselves to most diligently is the thing that we worship and serve. Two qualifiers are given to the command to serve: “in sincerity,” i.e., in completeness, fullness, integrity, with wholehearted commitment; “in truth,” i.e., in faithfulness, with a sense of certainty and dependability.

In Genesis 2:15 we read, “Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (lit: “to serve and guard it”). These words are linked together in terms of providing care for the garden. In Joshua, the same two words are used to encourage Israel to covenant loyalty: “guard” is the key word of chapters 22 and 23; “serve” is the key word of chapter 24. Just as God had placed man in the garden, so God had brought Israel out of Egypt and placed her in the land of Canaan, “a land flowing with milk and honey”—a new Eden. And God tells Israel to guard the word and to love him and him only. What Israel is being instructed to do here is cultivate the garden of their soul—their relationship with God.

The garden of Eden story ended in disaster, of course. Both the man and the woman chose not to serve God. They wanted to become like him. Finding no idol in the garden they made themselves the idol. And they were cast out of the garden for their sin. Joshua had already warned the people that if they did not serve the LORD God, which they would fail to do, then they too would be cast out of the land: “the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you” (Josh. 23:16b).

God has acted in kind and gracious ways towards us, his people. He has given us the greatest gift of all—life in Christ. In return, he asks us for our exclusive loyalty and service. This is why we were created and redeemed. Our response to God’s love should be to serve and worship him wholeheartedly.

Serving God doesn’t mean we have to become involved in a whole range of Christian activities. It doesn’t mean that we quit our jobs and become missionaries, although it might mean just that. Serving God is a lot more organic and basic to our existence.

First, our service is to be exclusive. One cannot fear God and serve other gods at the same time. This is what Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; for either he

will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Therefore we must completely remove everything that competes for our loyalty to God. Many idols demand our service: the god of money, the god of success, the god of perfection, the god of education, the god of family, the god of Christian activities. But to really serve the Lord we must remove these idols from our lives. God requires our exclusive loyalty and service.

Secondly, serving God must occupy every event, every affection and attitude. Throughout the day we must live for him and not ourselves. We must be conscious that everything we say and do can be an expression of serving God: the way we look at someone, the way we smile and say hello. We serve by praying, caring, and practicing hospitality. We can serve God at work, in the kitchen, at the grocery store, as well as at church. We are God’s redeemed possession, the vassals of a great King. Let us live in service of him.

But we’re not very good at that, are we? Adam and Eve failed miserably in the garden. So did Israel in Canaan. We are no different. We are proud and selfish and competitive. We have our own goals and agendas. We lack the readiness to make ourselves available to serve. We don’t come to church with an attitude of offering ourselves fully to God. We try to serve him while continuing to hold onto the things we want. We are too big and our God is too small.

Joshua asks Israel to declare their intentions, demanding that they make a choice. He knows they will serve some god. That is why he asks them if they will serve the gods of Terah, the gods of the Amorites, or the God of Israel. He gives each tribe and each family the freedom to decide for themselves. But, he declares, “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” In response, all of Israel declares they will do the same.

How do you think Joshua sounded when he made this statement? Did he thrust his right hand high in the air and shout these words at the top of his voice? I don’t think so. I picture a look of firm resolve on his face, not an emotional, superficial expression designed to manipulate the people. Joshua knows exactly what he is saying. He knows God and what God desires, and he knows his own weakness and vulnerability, so he speaks with sincerity, commitment and passion.

Joshua asks us to make a choice, too. Certainly, we will serve a god. The only question is, which one? This question disturbs us. It is intended to do so. Will we serve Yahweh, or the old gods of Terah, or the new gods of Canaan? God gives to us complete freedom to choose. If it is “evil in our eyes” to serve Yahweh, then by all means, God says we have the freedom to serve any god we like. It is up to us to choose.

Dr. John Smith was a missionary doctor in a remote part of Africa in the late 1800’s. He served there for ten years until his health failed. A fellow physician encour-

aged him to return to the States or he would surely die within six months. Two months later, Smith finally agreed to leave Africa. Some of the village people put him in a canoe and rowed him out to a ship anchored in the bay. As Smith boarded the ship he turned back for one last look and saw the villagers lined along the shore. He heard their cries for him to return.

Without hesitation, Smith put his bags back into the canoe and returned to the village. Three months later, the villagers gathered together again and cried. This time they gathered around his grave.

When we make a choice to serve the Lord it will probably be costly. It certainly was costly to Jesus. Remember what he said: "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). Over the centuries, countless Christians have been willing to give up their dreams, their possessions, even their lives because they heard the call of the King to serve him and him alone.

On this great occasion, in his last address to the nation, Joshua and the people of Israel make a choice to serve the Lord. The text goes on to describe just how dramatically and formally they did so. Verse 19:

Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you." And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." And Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses." "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of

the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, lest you deny your God." Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.

And it came about after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of Mount Gaash. And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel. Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons. And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim. (24:19-33)

Which god will we serve? Who will we choose? We can't put this off until tomorrow, until after we have had our fling. Tomorrow may be too late. Remember Joshua's words, "Choose for yourselves *today* whom you will serve."

Let each of us ask ourselves:

What things or people do I serve and worship in my life more than God?

How has God been asking me to serve in ways I have been unwilling to do?

Am I willing to call myself a slave of Christ who will follow where he leads?

May we be like Israel in the days of Joshua: "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel" (24:31).

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