

EXPERIENCING GOD'S JUSTICE



+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God wins the victory for His people, who must follow Him in faith.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Joshua 7–11

+ SETTING:

The Lord won the battle of Jericho on behalf of His people, the Israelites. He collapsed the wall and handed the city over to Israel for its total destruction and required that all the precious metals be devoted for His use in the tabernacle. He warned that if the Israelites did not honor this command, then destruction and trouble would come upon the disobedient and the entire camp. Against the backdrop of Israel's faithful obedience at Jericho and Rahab's faithful actions toward the spies, and the blessings of God's reward, one man chose to transgress God's command. And soon, his secret sin found him out.

DAY 1

READ:

Joshua 7:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 7:1-5

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Does it make sense to pray for guidance about the future if we are not obeying in the thing that lies before us today? How many momentous events in Scripture depended on one person's seemingly small act of obedience! Rest assured: Do what God tells you to do now, and, depend upon it, you will be shown what to do next."¹

-Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

No matter the area of life, it is tempting to assume our past performance is an indicator of future success. Whether at work or in school, in professional or personal circumstances, we assume that if we just keep doing what worked once, we'll experience the same results. Naturally, there's a problem with this line of thinking: it's just not true because what we don't know changes things.

Joshua and the Israelites were riding the high of their victory—or rather, God's victory—over Jericho (Josh. 6). By faith, they obeyed God's commands, marching around the city walls and blowing their horns each day. And when the walls fell, they destroyed the city. They devoted everything to destruction, as God commanded. Except they didn't.

Unbeknownst to the rest of Israel, Achan, a member of the tribe of Judah, took for himself some of what was set apart for God. And the Lord's anger burned against not only Achan but all of Israel as a result, just as God had said (Josh. 6:18-19).

Joshua didn't know this. He saw the fruit of their faithfulness in the conquest of Jericho and assumed this success would continue. But when his troops returned from attacking Ai, a small city, with news of their defeat and thirty-six dead, he and all the Israelites lost heart.

It is easy for us to see fruit, evidence of God's work in our lives and ministries, and believe we're living and acting in faith, which may be true. But because of our sin, we are also prone to being deceived by our successes. As a result, if we are not watchful, testing ourselves and our fruit to see if we are in the Spirit, then we can become complacent and find ourselves acting unfaithfully for our own glory rather than faithfully for God's.

Where are you tempted toward complacency in your faith? Ask God to reveal these places to you.

DAY 2

READ:

Joshua 7:6-15

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 7:6-12

NOTES

When Israel was defeated at Ai, Joshua and the elders lamented. Why did they cross the Jordan into this land only to die? Did they misunderstand God, or worse, had He deceived them? These questions likely seem familiar. If we're being honest, we've all asked them at one time or another. When everything seems to be going wrong, we are quick to turn on God. We've all done it, even if only for a moment. When difficulty comes, we instinctively respond with doubt and unbelief:

Where was God when...?

Why didn't God stop this?

Did God deceive me?

We all have experiences that don't make sense to us, moments far more complicated than cause-and-effect thinking allows, moments that challenge our attempts to categorize our lives. But even though life is more complicated than that, this doesn't mean there aren't moments when the truth of cause-and-effect applies. Joshua and Israel learned this with a rebuke from the Lord. He did not deceive them, and He wasn't leading them into Canaan to destroy them. Achan stole that which was set apart for God. He disobeyed God's command, and Israel was collectively experiencing the consequences.

God wants His people to pursue holiness—to be committed to living as His set-apart people in this world. And He loves us too much to allow us to settle for anything less. While we should not view every negative experience in our lives as the direct result of sins committed, we would be wise to see them as an opportunity to examine our hearts and lives. They just might be a Father's loving rebuke to His wayward child.

How has God used your circumstances to reveal a pattern of sin in your life?

DAY 3

READ:

Joshua 7:16-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 7:20-26

NOTES

Few of us are comfortable with the idea of God's judgment. While sometimes our discomfort has to do with our awareness that we deserve God's judgment, much of the time it's rooted in false distinctions: God is either loving or He is wrathful. He is either gracious or He executes judgment. But the story of Israel's conquest of the promised land and God's judgment of Achan reminds us that judgment is far more complicated and nuanced than we might first believe,

When we read about the consequences of Achan's sin, it's tempting to view this whole scenario as overkill. After all, Achan "only" stole a few objects (that were expressly set apart for God or for destruction). His sin was not merely theft. His sin was an act of defiance, of rebellion, against God—Achan dishonored the Lord. Achan's story, therefore, is a reminder of God's righteous judgment against rebellion. The penalty he received illustrates the gravity of sin. So if we have a problem with the punishment, then our problem actually might be that we don't understand the gravity of our sin.

But even as Achan's story reminds us of God's judgment and righteousness, it also reminds us that such demonstrations of His holiness are not typical. We often observe the opposite: Those who chase after personal pleasure often seem to be the most happy and successful, at least temporarily. But God's severe judgment here is intended to point us to the much greater eternal judgment that awaits all those who would ignore God's covenant. It would do us well, therefore, to avoid following in Achan's missteps and instead to obey God and follow Him wholeheartedly.

What are some reasons we might be tempted to lessen the gravity of sin?

DAY 4

READ:

Joshua 8:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 8:1-2

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #61:

CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION

Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. Sin resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in enmity between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's death, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Do not be discouraged. Imagine Joshua hearing these words while preparing for battle after all that had transpired: An incredible victory at Jericho. An astounding defeat at Ai. The execution of Achan and his entire family because of his sin. How could Joshua not have been discouraged? This time was different though. When the Israelites first attacked Ai, there was no promise of God's presence because of sin in the camp. But now God's wrath against Achan's sin was satisfied; atonement had been made. So now God would be with them. There was no need to be discouraged.

Once atonement has been made for sin and accepted by God, what was done in the past stays in the past. True, there may still be temporal consequences we experience for our choices, but our eternal relationship with the Lord has been restored. We must take responsibility for our sin before God through repentance, but then we can look forward to living out His great purposes for us. That's what happened here as Joshua prepared to lead the people into battle, and that's what happens for us through Jesus. When we sin, we do not have to fear that God is against us, that He is far off or looking to punish us. That misses the point of the gospel altogether. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus brings permanent peace with God and the promise of His eternal presence with us.

In other words, through Jesus, God is always for us. So we do not need to be discouraged, even in our darkest moments. Instead, we can look to Him in faith. When God is not for you, there is no hope for victory in the truest sense of the word. But when He is for you, then you have all the hope you need and more.

**Do you believe that because of Jesus, God is for you?
Why or why not?**

DAY 5

READ:

Joshua 8:14-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Joshua 8:14-21

NOTES

The way Ai's king and army responded to the situation before them demonstrated the success of the trap and the wisdom of God's plan. When Joshua and the warriors of Israel reappeared in front of the city, ready for battle, the army of Ai hurried down toward them, confident of a second victory. Joshua and his soldiers then fled, giving the appearance of a second rout. The attackers from Ai followed after them, which left the city undefended. So Israel's army laying in ambush entered the city and set it ablaze, leaving no place for the people of Ai to retreat. The strategy worked just as the Lord had planned, and Israel won and celebrated in victory because of God's faithfulness to His people and their faithfulness to God.

The pattern of Israel's experience here is a picture of their whole history. Obedience leads to victory. Victory is followed by blessing. Blessing is taken for granted and pride and disobedience take root. That disobedience leads to defeat and judgment. That judgment is followed by repentance. Repentance bears fruit in obedience. Obedience leads to victory. Repeat as necessary.

This pattern is also the spiritual reality for many followers of Christ today. While that might seem discouraging, it's the reality of life in a fallen world. Because of our struggle with sin, we will inevitably take the victories and blessings God gives us for granted. We will disobey Him, and we will experience the consequences of our disobedience. But God doesn't leave us there. As our loving Father, He draws us back to Himself, toward repentance and obedience. And He will do it again, every time, until the day we stand before Him perfect and holy, clothed eternally in the righteousness of Christ.

Where do you see this pattern in your life? What steps will you take to live faithfully and obediently?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Do you not see these wars? Do you not hear of these disasters? Do you learn no lesson from these things? ... If hell does not bring us to our senses, yet let these things. What, are these too mere threats, are they not facts that have already taken place? Great is the punishment they have suffered, yet a greater still shall we suffer, who are not brought to our senses even by their fate."²

-Chrysostom (c. 347-407)

POINT 1: Unfaithfulness leads to defeat
(Josh. 7:1-5).

Achan's sin was much more than petty _____, it was a matter of faithful _____ and a matter of _____ and _____.

? How do human beings typically evaluate the gravity of sin?

Achan's sin affected all of Israel, such that they lost a _____, they lost _____, and they lost _____.

? What are some ways believers' sins affect the church?

POINT 2: Sin leads to judgment
(Josh. 7:20-26).

Achan thought he could _____ and _____ his rebellion, but the Lord sees all, knows all, and brings hidden sins to _____ and _____.

? Why do we try to hide our sin, or think we can?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #61: CHRIST AS RECONCILIATION

Ever since the fall of the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, God and human beings have been estranged. _____ resulted not only in an estranged relationship with God but also in _____ between God and humanity. Sin is an infinite offense against an infinite God. Thankfully, God loves His enemies and has sent Christ to be the reconciler between us and God. Through Christ's _____, God provides the means whereby that broken relationship is restored and renewed (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

POINT 3: Faithfulness leads to victory

(Josh. 8:1-2,14-21; 11:23).

Where _____ had once caused defeat and death, faithful _____ now resulted in victory because of the faithfulness of God. The Lord fulfilled His promise of giving Israel the _____ and giving them _____.



What are some ways believers today experience victory through their faithfulness?

MY RESPONSE

Because Christ fought the battle against sin and death and won the victory on our behalf, we proclaim Him to others so that they too may find peace through Him.

- **HEAD:** How should we view our sin in light of God's wrath and judgment against Achan, his family, and against Israel?
- **HEART:** What sinful actions and attitudes will you repent of so you can obey the Lord with faith and joy?
- **HANDS:** What confessions will you make this week: seeking forgiveness for a sin against another; confessing faith in Jesus Christ for salvation; sharing your faith with others so they will repent, believe, and be saved?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"[To have faith in Christ] means, of course, trying to **do** all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a **new** way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you."³

-C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)