

All right. Let's open our Bibles this evening to Joshua 7 as we continue our verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter romp through the Old Testament.

The book of Joshua is the story of the first twenty-five years of the second generation of God's people going in to occupy and take the land that God had promised for generations to His people. It only runs from about 1405 or so to 1379 B.C. (I guess that's about right) - twenty-five years in that timeframe. And so it is a time when, in the land, people are living that God has prepared for judgment. He'd waited for them for generations to repent, and they had not. And so God uses the Jews to be a judgment stick against the people. It isn't that it's unfair or, "Man, how cruel is God?" God had waited and waited, and this cancer of this heathen way of life continued, and God had had enough. And so the people would be His judgment stick.

When Moses spoke to the children of Israel before going in, he said to them in Deuteronomy 7:22 that the LORD would drive out these nations before them a little bit at a time. He said, "You'll never be able to take them out at once. There're too many beasts in the land, they're too numerous for you. And lest you be defeated, we're just going to work with you, and you're going to throw them over king by king, by land by land, and wipe out - utterly destroy - the abominations and the idolatry and all." But the LORD'S promise was that it would take some time and that they needed to remember that the LORD had brought them in and that the LORD would lead them through.

In the next couple of weeks, as we go through Joshua (and the book outlines pretty easily - it's an easy one to remember what's in it), we're going to look at three major military campaigns that God took His people through. Basically in the middle of the country first; then He draws up a bunch of kings from the south to come fight against Joshua, and it's like the LORD picked them all up and said, "Here, Joshua, take these guys out;" and the same thing happened in the north. And so, over a seven-and-a-half-year period, Joshua leads the people over thirty-one enemy groups - armies, if you will, strongholds - so that by the time those seven and a half years are over with, Joshua, who is now older and tired and not really able to lead any longer, the LORD kind of sets him aside, and He says, "Now I'm

going to put the people in the land where I want them to be, and it'll be their job to personally rid that portion of the land from the enemy that remains." But in those seven and a half years all of the major players - the strong opponents - were destroyed and degraded in their power. So, the LORD had gone before them. But they would be, like I said, the judgment stick of the LORD into the land. He was going to punish it, He said in Leviticus 18:25, "For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants." That's what He said of the wickedness of these folks.

Chapters 1-5 of this book give us all of the preparations that God took the people through for their conquest and the crossing of the Jordan. They arrived safely. They stayed at a place a mile away called Gilgal (where it would be their center of operations for the next several years), and that's where you'll find them going every time that there's a reorganization, if you will.

Last week we looked at Joshua 6, and we asked the LORD to show us some secrets to victory; because here the nation fought their first big enemy, a walled city of tremendous strength - Jericho. And God used very unorthodox ways to get them to have a victory. And so we looked at the story last week, but we looked at it from the standpoint of what can we learn about how God works. And we talked to you last week that the LORD said (in verse 2 of that chapter), "I've given you the land," and we said sometimes in our desire to go forward and serve the Lord, we should know that the Lord has gone before. In other words, victory has already been provided. God has already provided the things that we're going to be facing. We need obedience to His battle strategy even when we don't fully understand what He is doing. We should worship the Lord before the things come to pass because if we truly believe that He is going to do the work, then He can be praised even before we see it. And then lastly we looked at make sure you don't take any credit for His work. Right? He wants the glory, He wants the credit. And at least in Jericho, He did all the work except for some guys marching around yelling now and again.

So, on the heels of this glorious and miraculous work of God, the first conquest in the land, comes this next chapter chronicling some of the reasons you don't have victory and some of the reasons that we can be defeated in our walks. In fact, notice in verse 27 (chapter 6) the words, "So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country." And then you read (chapter 7:1), "But." Now verse 27 gives you excitement - glorious statement; and then, "But," which

doesn't sound good, and it's not good because what we are given in this chapter is the defeat of the children of Israel to a relatively smaller foe because they had forgotten who they were serving and forgotten that it was God that worked with them. Now I told you about the three campaigns in the next seven and a half years. This battle at Ai, along with Jericho, and then the Gibeonite issue that comes up in chapter 9 (we get the defeat of Ai next week, but then in chapter 9 is the Gibeonites), besides that there aren't a lot of particulars. Then there's just a lot of broad, general kinds of rules and lessons that we can learn. But God picks these three events, and they occur pretty early on in that seven-and-a-half-year period, to drive home the lessons of conquest. And so you have the Jericho lessons. Tonight you get the Ai lessons. And then in chapter 9 we'll get the lessons from the Gibeonites, which they should have known better but they didn't at all.

So tonight we'll give you some reasons to be defeated. If you find that this is in your life, this is not good. Verse 1 of chapter 7 says this, "But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel." The accounts in the Bible of God's longsuffering and patience and love are far more prevalent than His judgments; far more so. But at times of flagrant disobedience, and in full light of His revelation and His demands, God sometimes will and has dealt openly and decisively with sin in someone's life to set an example to others. And He does it, more often than not (at least in the Bible), at a time when He begins a new work of grace or a fresh work. It's almost like, "I'm gonna do a work, and by the way, I'm not kiddin' around here." And so wherever that work begins, there is that hand of God, if you will, at work setting that example or making His holiness very clear in the lives of the people. And that's certainly true here as well.

You might remember the dealings that God took with Aaron's children. If you go back to Leviticus 10, the LORD had gotten them to a place where the tabernacle was built and the preparation was made and the priests had been ordained and the sacrifices had been explained; and the nation gathered together for the first time to offer a sacrifice that would bridge the gap, if you will, between God and sinful man - a bruised back, the shedding of blood. And they all gathered that day, and they put the offering on the altar, and they all stood back, and the LORD rattled the ground, and then fire comes flying out of heaven, and then it jumps out of the

sanctuary (the tabernacle), and it lights this on fire. And people, "Oh, that's the LORD!" And everybody just hits the deck. God accepts this method of approach for us. And then there're these two goons - two of Aaron's kids - who stood up (Nadab and Abihu); and they get up with strange fire, not the fire the LORD lit but the fire they'd lit, and they begin to run around the place. And rather than people's eyes being on the LORD, they start to watch these guys running around. And they should have known better - they were from a priestly family - they should have known about the holiness of God. But they ignored it, if you will. And rather than the LORD being glorified, they took a lot of glory away from Him, and then the LORD dealt with it very severely. He let the fire jump out of that place of sacrifice, and it burned these two guys to death - right in the eyes of all of the people who were gathered. And the LORD said to Moses, "Now you say to Aaron that this is what the LORD wants you to know - those who will come near to Me, I have to be regarded as holy. And before all of the people, I have to be glorified." Now it's one of my pastoral verses for my ministry life - that I have to never forget that when it comes to standing near the Lord, He's holy, and when it comes to standing before people in His name, He's got to get the glory and the credit and the honor. Because that really took out two guys who God had great plans for, but they didn't consider God holy, they didn't consider Him being glorified as an issue for them, and they lost their lives as a result. In fact, the LORD said to Aaron, "Don't you weep. Make sure everyone learns this is how God is."

In the New Testament, when Ananias and Sapphira were there at the birth of the age of grace, when the church was just born, this couple sought to honor themselves and, again, steal honor from the Lord by acting in a very magnanimous way saying they were contributing the proceeds of something that they owned that they certainly had every right to keep. But they made it known to the church, "Oh, we're just giving this all to the Lord." Obviously, it wasn't all to the Lord at all, but it was some kind of a sham, and the Lord knew about it, as always. And so, there in Acts 5, one by one both he and his wife were met at the door with the judgment of God, and it was public, and it was severe, and these guys dropped dead at the doors of the church, and they carried them out. And then it says, "Great fear fell upon everyone." I'm thinking of course! No one's going to church next week messing around. They're all sitting up real straight and quiet. Right? But it had the effect, I think, that the Lord intended it to have.

I'm sure that that is the way this chapter fits in with the work of God because here's this fellow named Achan, whom God will publicly and severely deal with; and not just him - his family and everything that he owns. And again there'll be that understanding that, as they set about on this trek of faith to take the land, God needs to be in that holy place where He gets honored and He's glorified.

I'm grateful reading through the Bible that God doesn't deal with all of us as He did with Nadab and Abihu or with Ananias and Sapphira or with Achan and his family. I think He could probably do the same with us. We've probably been unfaithful enough where, at any one point, we could just get taken out, too. In fact, the church - if it met together every week and God did this, pretty soon the church would just disappear I would think. But yet God does do these things - at His bidding as He decides to do so - in a way that will be stark reminders to us that He's a holy God, and we're called to obey Him, and it's only by His grace given to us by His Son that we survive this stuff. We stand by the grace of God.

Up to now for the children of Israel (and up to now meaning all of one chapter), things had gone remarkably well. Right? They had marched for seven days, they'd yelled and screamed, and that idiotic idea of Joshua's - that he said the LORD told him to do - the walls did fall down, and we did have complete victory, and God did exactly what He said. And the questioning of God's tactics had now been laid to rest. This is certainly the way that God is going to do it. So, here comes this new generation that had quickly seen what God could do in the most obvious way and in the most glorious way; and yet, in verse 1 of chapter 7, you and I are told something that none of them knew. The 2½ million people that were with Joshua didn't know what we just read (in chapter 7:1). So, God knew about the rebel; the rebel knew about himself. God had given specific instruction (back in verses 18 and 19 of the last chapter) that, at least in this instance, whatever fruit or spoils were left in the defeated city would not belong to the people for their labors (that would come later) - it would belong to the LORD because He wanted all the credit. He did all the work. So He said, "Don't take anything, don't touch anything, don't take it for yourself, don't hold it. It all goes into the treasury. It belongs to the LORD." Because He wanted the people to understand that He was the One giving complete victory and that they were the ones that were serving Him. It was simply forgetting this direction that sets before us the defeat of an entire people so shortly after a great victory.

But here's the first lesson you want to learn about defeat - God knows even when you think you're getting away with something. Right? Because verse 1 tells us the LORD knew exactly what was going on. In fact, it was what was going on that kept Him from acting in giving them the victory that they hoped to find with Him. He certainly dealt with them according to their best interest. It does reveal how quickly temptation for pride sets in when we begin to experience the hand of God upon our life. "Oh, the Lord used me, I shared, they got saved," and I start to rejoice in how great I am, rather than, "Man, the Lord used my life!" God knows, and you should never forget that God knows. God knows your motives, your intentions. He knows your actions and behavior. The Lord just knows. And it teaches me clearly that in order for the Lord to use me today, I better seek Him today. Because what happened in Jericho was the result of God speaking to them then. Right? It was seven days of direction from the LORD for that. But the next day, as they get up to go to Ai, God hadn't said anything yet about anything. They had now begun to already run on their own. You can't live on yesterday's obedience, and you certainly can't count on yesterday's blessings for today. And the reason God does that is pretty clear - because else we'd just show up at church once a week or once a month and go, "Hey, bless me, Lord. I gotta go, and I'll be back as soon as I run out of gas." No. The Lord wants daily relationship. So that requires daily seeking of the Lord, and God waits for you to do that often so that He might move in your life. I learned that God loves me, and even if He loves me, as I know that He does, He doesn't condone sin. He'll deal with disobedience for my benefit. You can't hide anything from him.

The name "Achan" means troubler or someone that brings trouble. It's kind of like that little leaven that crawls into the loaf of bread, and it leavens the whole thing. The whole nation now has the brakes on. People are dying. They're a laughingstock - and they've only been in the land a week (in terms of battle) - because there was sin in the camp, and here was this fellow Achan. If you allow sin to get a foothold in your life, God's work will (in you) soon stop. It just stops. And there is something valuable to learn, especially if you're teaching others, that God's blessing follows the heart of someone who's serving the Lord from an obedient heart; not a sinless life but a yielded one.

So, number one - God knows. Know that. Don't forget that. God knows. Old Achan didn't think God knew. "There's 2½ million. What is the likelihood He picks me?" Oh, yeah, He knows. Yeah, that's one in 2½ million. It's a lucky guess. No. It's not. God knows.

Second of all - self-confidence is a sure way to lose. Self-confidence has no power at all. Here's what it says in verse 2, "Now Joshua" (and remember, verse 1 is just an insight God gives you before He tells you the story - no one else knew) "sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, 'Go up and spy out the country.' 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, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.' " Now, if you've been to Israel or maybe you remember walking around there at all, Jericho is about 1200 feet below sea level. Bethel and Ai, which are sitting together, are almost 3000 feet above sea level. It's quite a hump to get up there. Right? It's quite a climb. And if you go to Israel today, it is still the natural route traveled in the land. It's where the road just naturally has been built and goes. Ai was a very small town. It was west of Jericho. It was located between - here's how the LORD writes, I love how the Holy Spirit writes - it's located between Beth Aven (which is the words for house of iniquity) and Bethel (which is house of God). It's located right between the house of sin and the house of God. So you can get to Ai from two places - through flesh or faith. Right? Stuck right in the middle. It's a pretty good little picture. Like I said, I love how the Holy Spirit writes. The spies, notice, were sent out as they had been before. That's not a bad idea. I mean, you will find in the Bible, as God moves His people around, that there's something about due diligence that's important to Him and that doesn't negate your faith; it's just you do your best, you commit the rest. But both the hidden sin of Achan and what we will learn to be the presumptuous sin of Joshua and the people in the army had nothing to do with what they spied out. They came back with a report that was without any kind of influence from the Spirit of God or from knowledge of what might be going on that they didn't see. And so Joshua soon will wake up, as the people will, to realize that if they don't seek the LORD and His direction, they're not going to find victory because self-confidence is the way that you lose as a believer. You can't win.

Notice that the spies come back with a bold, if not very fleshy, appraisal of the task. Notice what they say in verse 3 here. "It's a small town. We really don't need everyone. We're gonna be okay. We're just gonna try to make it through. But I think we're gonna survive it and all." Which is an awful long, if you will, cry from chapter 2:24 when Joshua said to the people, "The LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us." That's what he heard when the spies came back from

spying out the land. "God's given to us. God's with us." Notice what they said here. "Yeah, we don't need everybody. It's a big climb, it's a big mountain. We're all gonna be tired. Let's just sent a couple of thousand guys. We really don't need everyone. So let's just go on our own." Right? "Why weary the people? The city is small." And I thought to myself - how weary could these people have been? For the last week, at least six of the days, they marched around the city once and went, (Pastor Jack makes a yawning sound), "That's enough, and I'm going home." The seventh day, all right, great. They had a jaunt. They walked seven-eight miles, and then they yelled, and then they went home, and then they won. "Oh, we are weary." Oh, yeah, it sounds like you're just tore up. But notice the cockiness, notice the self-confidence. "A small town, we don't need but a little bit of troops, it's a hard climb, we don't want to wear ourselves out." And you want to say to these guys, as you read because you're just sitting here with your Bible, "Oh, really? So you're off on your own now? You guys have just got it figured out? You don't need the LORD now. The LORD got you through Jericho. Now you figured it out, right? Little meeting's all you need." And we read it, and we say to ourselves - how quickly we can lose our dependence upon the Lord. I remember, and I wrote it in my Bible, a quote that I read (and I would love to tell you who said it, but I didn't write it down), but it said, "The moon never suffers an eclipse except at a time when it's full." And I think that's right. When you're full of yourself, you're in trouble. Right? Especially as a believer. You really have no place to go but down, if you will. And it's the same spirit that you find in Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel 4) when he had been warned by the LORD and a year later walks around Babylon and says, "Lookit, this is the great Babylon that I have built for my royal dwelling place by my power and for my honor." And then the LORD, in the middle of his boasting, took it away from him. But it was that cockiness of, "I don't need anybody but me." There's that story in Deuteronomy 32 where there's a fellow named Jeshurun, and it says that he "grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese!" And then it says, "Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation." He got successful, he made strides in the world, and he just went, "I don't need the LORD anymore," and God set him aside. But he didn't get it. Or what Samuel said to Saul (there in 1 Samuel 15), "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not the head of the tribes of Israel? When you were small in your own eyes. And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? When you were small in your eyes. But look at you now, and now God doesn't want anything to do with you. He's going to set you aside."

So, self-confidence is a sure way to find yourself on the backside. You'll be knocked down. And it does seem that the greatest danger we face of falling in defeat in this area is when we don't see how problematic it is for us. For example, had they saw the Ai town as threatening, they'd have prayed. But they assumed it wasn't a problem. When you see stuff that you can just handle - "I'll just handle this. Don't bother the Lord with this stuff. This is the lightweight. We'll call Him with the cancer. But the sniffles we don't need Him to be.....everybody's got sniffles." And we try to assess our problem and decide it's not really enough to bother the Lord with. And so, rather than being aware of their weakness and their dependency upon God, their self-confidence caused them to give this advice to Joshua. And I wrote under verse 4 - we have no right to call on the Lord if we don't make full use of what He's already appointed. And in this case, it would have been - they might have been wise to pray a little bit. "Lord, what would You have us do now? That thing at Jericho was cool. We going to march again? We going to yell again? What have You got up Your sleeve for this one?" And then they could have been spared all of the problems that they found themselves in.

Jesus said (John 15:5), "Without Me, you can do" what? "nothing." Believe that? Believe that. Why is it we try so hard to disprove that statement? It seems to me people are always trying to work real hard to prove that "I can still do stuff without Him." Right? My life and your lives and your testimonies, I think, are to the accuracy of what Jesus said.

Well here's this fledgling nation, and God blessed them. They've made a huge stride into the land. They've seen the most amazing of victorious overthrows. But they walked away from that not saying God was the One we need to hang on to; they walked away underestimating their own needs and the strength of their enemy and the goodness of God. They had it all wrong. They missed it all - in a matter of days. Two errors for the price of one. "Why take all?" they asked. Isn't that what they said? "Why should we take everybody and wear them all out?" Well, they took everybody last time because God wanted everyone to see that He was God, that He wanted everyone involved so that they could all say, "Oh, we saw the LORD work." If for no other reason - like they needed a reason - God had taken them all so that He might reveal Himself to all. Maybe the victory dance that night wiped them all out. I don't know. Maybe they got so tired patting each other on the back that they didn't want to go to war the next day.

But self-confidence is really ugly. It's really ugly. We applaud it in our culture, most of the time. "Oh, he's so confident." Not good biblically. Not that you shouldn't do your best, not that you shouldn't give it your all, and not that you shouldn't walk with everything that God has given you. But, look, your confidence can't be in you. Self-confidence is a position you come to when you are unable to recognize your weakness and inability and His strength and His power. So, if you want a blessing killer, just be self-confident.

Now, though the problem or, at least in our story, the root of the problem - they were unaware of. That was Achan and his secret sin that no one could have known about. Israel was guilty of taking things into their own hands and presuming that God would help them with whatever they came up with on their own. Right? Here's the connection between the two - this is secret; God was available publicly. Had they sought the LORD publicly, He would have just said, "Yeah, I can't go with you right now, there's sin in the camp," and it would have gotten dealt with before the defeat. It would have worked itself out. How often have you gotten into something, and you said, "Man, I wish I'd have prayed more"? Or, "I just wish I'd have prayed at all." Or, "I should have been praying!" And you look back, and you go, "Man, that was stupid! If God would have just shown me." But He couldn't show you because you didn't bother asking. You got it all figured out. And so had they prayed, I think they'd have heard about His anger, they'd have heard about His judgment, thirty-six guys would not be dead, almost three thousand of them running in fear. They just had this unbelievable victory in faith. It's a spiritual high, no doubt. I would have been all excited. And yet how quickly they become prideful and arrogant, and they do this. It's dangerous, and it'll diminish your hope and your confidence if you don't listen to what God has to say and give Him honor.

Each of these battles that we will face with them in the book of Joshua contains enemies that they can't win against - big walls, huge giants, overwhelming size of armies. Every turn is unscalable, and the victory is out of reach. And yet this one's different. This one looked to them like, "We can do this." It's easy to pray when the enemies are bigger than you. I don't think this sin could have been committed at Jericho because there's no way they got in. But notice the assessment. When you see a problem as, "I don't need God's help," then you're in trouble, and it plays right into this self-confidence that can just tear you down. So, they come away with the attitude (in verse 3), "We got this. We can handle this." And my question as I read this is - when did the LORD tell you to just take a few thousand men with you? When did that happen? Who's heard from the LORD?

Who's speaking for the LORD now? You're often the most vulnerable to fall into sin and the sin of self-confidence when you have had a victory, and you're pretty sure now you can handle anything. And you can't. Self-reliance ruins us in our walks with God.

So, unfortunately, notice in verse 3 that when they came to Joshua with their advice, Joshua does what everybody does in the group. He listens to them, he smugly sends them out to fight, there're just a few people they end up sending (verse 4) - three thousand (they said two or three thousand, so he went with the higher number). Verse 4, "So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent;" (because, like I said, it's 4200 feet down) "therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water." They hadn't sought the LORD. They had figured it out on themselves. They saw this as the smallest city so, "We really don't have a problem here. We can handle it. We don't need God's help." But lookit, without the Lord, the world will defeat you. I don't care how big your problem is or how small it is; you're going to lose. Right? You're not going to win.

So, know that God knows, be careful of self-confidence. Thirdly - don't follow the counsel of men. Follow the wisdom of God. Real helpful. The biggest way to make money today is be a guy who comments on things. Facebook, I think, exists to have comments so you just tell me what you think, what I think. Talk shows - they just tell you what they think. They're a dime a dozen. And then what does God say? Right? This was a group effort, it was a consensus, everybody voted. "This is a good idea. Three thousand." "How many?" "I like to go climb a mountain." "All right, you're in." And off they went. It was a consensus, it was trouble. But they were following the wisdom of men. Joshua did not pray. Joshua, the leader, did not say, "Well, let's check in with the LORD." He just said to the guys, "Hey, high five, spies. All right, grab the three thousand, and let's presumptuously go." And I tell you what - in verse 8 and verse 7 and verse 6 - Joshua learns to pray; just a little late. (Pastor Jack speaks in a crying/whining tone), "Oh, my God! Where are You? Thanks a lot. We're lookin' terrible now. Your name's about to be wiped out. Why did You send us here?" It sounds a lot like the children of Israel under Moses. And this is the leader, this is the guy everybody looks up to. Not good. I remember reading in the book of Galatians, when Paul was describing to them how God had called him, and he says in the first chapter, "When it pleased God, who

separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood," (verses 15-16). "I didn't turn to people and go, 'What do you think? You think I'd make a good preacher to the Gentiles?' " Instead, he said (verse 17), "Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." "And for three years I said, 'Lord, if that's your will, then make that happen.' " But he didn't go check with people. He checked with the Lord. Not that good counsel isn't helpful. "In a multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 24:6). But, hey, not if the wisdom is coming from a bunch of guys who don't know how to pray or aren't willing to pray..... I see people, all the time, running into church, and they'll come to the services when there's trouble at hand. "Pastor, can you pray for me? This is what's going on." And they lay it out. But the minute it goes away, so do they. When the challenges are small, they're not around. When they're big, they don't have anywhere other to turn. The prophet said how common that attitude is. Jeremiah said, in chapter 22:21, "I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not hear.' This has been your manner from your youth." God can't get through when everything is going well. And notice they were going well. They came out of Jericho going, "Man, we are tough guys. We're gonna be ownin' this land pretty soon."

Now here's the carnal advice. "We can handle it with a few thousand." You might want to write in the margin chapter 8:25 which tells us that there were twelve thousand people that lived in Ai. So their suggestion was, "We should take a 6:1 or a 4:1 disadvantage into battle. Even if they outnumber us 6:1, I think we're going to wipe 'em out." Now that's cocky, isn't it? Because it seems to me if you're fighting an army, you go, "Hey, we've got more people than they do. This is lookin' better." But they did it just the opposite. Right? To them, it was manageable. The counsel of man apart from the wisdom of God is frustrating, and it doesn't work. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1:1). Isn't that what we read? "Blessed is the man who does not stand in the path of sinners. Blessed is the man who does not sit in the seat of the scornful. Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). Blessed is that man, but not this man. Why is it that so many psychiatrists end up with mental problems? And why do marriage counselors often get divorced? And why do doctors get strung out on drugs and financial planners file bankruptcy? The counsel of men is not always so good, but the counsel of God is always good, isn't it? Always dependable for you and me. Seek

the Lord. That's the way to go. Seek the Lord. Know what He says. Learn His heart. Why not just head to the Lord first? Why make a u-turn? Why go around the block? Develop a dependency that is genuine, and you'll be back often.

So Joshua consults only with his spies. He doesn't bother to pray. And, like I said, following the counsel of men - not seeking the wisdom of God - is foolish. Pray. Because otherwise you can easily be defeated. For many times, I look back on my own life, I wish I had prayed more. And I think it's because I think the answer is obvious sometimes. "Oh, this is what we do." Can pray. "It's obvious. Just take a few thousand men. Don't wear yourself out. Obvious!" And then you're an idiot. That's obvious. (Laughing) And I've done that more than once. Look, prayer is not supposed to be your last resort. It's supposed to be your first resort. And you'll see it in verse 10 when the LORD says to Joshua, in no uncertain terms, "Get up off your face, man. What're you doing praying now? You're a little late to the party. Should have been checking in much sooner." He would have avoided all of the pitfalls had he just prayed first. Just prayed first. Thirty-six guys wouldn't be dead; 2964 guys would not be scared to death. Now, back in chapter 5 we read that the heathen kings were trembling at the presence of God's people. Now God's people are trembling at the presence of a small little town called Ai. Now God's people are trembling.

Well, verse 6, Joshua does finally get around to praying after the guys are dead and the defeat is clear and everybody's frightened. "Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads." And here's Joshua's prayer, " 'Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all - to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?' " Really? Listen to his prayer. This whole rout caught Joshua extremely by surprise, caught him completely off guard. And his prayer has the perspective that, "Hey, we're Your people, Man. What're You doin'? We deserve to be blessed." Taking absolutely out of context and then the Jericho experience. He's praying now, he's humbled now, he's fearful now. He spends the entire afternoon and evening with his group of elders. But notice that his tone and his thoughts and his concern reveal that the problem for him was that he didn't see any need to trust the LORD at all. "We're just God's

choice. What're we gonna do?" And he's running on his own wisdom. And verse 7, to me, sounds like you heard the people of Israel pray when Moses was around. "You brought us out here to defeat us. You brought us out here to die. We shouldn't have come at all." That's the problem with praying too late. The damage is already done, and now you're blaming God for not coming through. "Hey, thanks a lot, Lord, for having my back." He blames God because he sees no reason why there should have been any difficulty. The problem was Joshua.

Well, you pray, God'll answer. And so the LORD, in verse 10, says to Joshua, "Shut up!" Oh, no. "Get up!" It's the same thing. (Laughing) I'm pretty sure that's what He said. It's in the original, I'm pretty sure. "El shutto uppo." " 'Why do you lie thus on your face?' " "What are you doin'?" " 'Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken come of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.' " God's response is immediate. Joshua begins to seek the LORD, God's more than ready and willing to tell him what's going on. "Here's why I've withheld My blessing."

And here's another way you can be totally defeated - just entertain sin in your life. Keep and allow sin in the camp. Sin has broken the covenant. It was deliberate sin, it was hidden from view. Only God was aware of it, but that's all you need to know. Right? "You have set our iniquities before You," the psalmist writes (Psalm 90:8), "our secret sins in the light of Your countenance." Joshua didn't know. He's not supposed to know. But he's supposed to know God who knows, and that's the issue. I like the LORD's words here to Joshua, though. "Get up off your face, man. Stand up. This is a problem. And it wasn't Me. You didn't pray. 'Where were You, LORD? My name...what about Your name?' Hey, it wasn't My fault. I've been here the whole time. Where've you been, Mr. Johnny-come-lately? You want to go back over the Jordan? Hey, help yourself. What's wrong with you, Joshua? Remember how long it's taken us to get here?"

The LORD says, in verse 12, to Joshua, " 'Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction.' " You want to hide sin in your life? There's your description. You'll be "doomed to destruction." " 'Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.' " Sin dooms you, and God will not participate with you. The solution is pretty simple. Get rid of the sin. No matter how much you try to hide it - remember what we started

with? - God knows. He's not in the dark. He knows it all. Defeat is sure to come. And hidden sin and disobedience are great causes for defeat in the lives of the believers. His help is only available when the sin in the camp has been dealt with. It doesn't mean you're not falling into sin, and you're struggling with sin; it means you don't want to hide it, you're not trying to cover it, you're not protecting it, if you will. Do not expect God to participate in your compromise.

So here's the process. And now the LORD says to them, "Here's what we're going to do to get you back on My blessing track. Here're the steps we're going to take." And He outlines them for the leader. Verse 13, " 'Get up, sanctify the people, and say, "Sanctify yourselves" (literally means set yourself apart, check yourself out, look yourself up and down, know who you are and where you're coming from) "for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.' In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man. Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel." ' ' " So, sanctify yourself. Check yourself out. Analyze if it's you. Now you ask yourself - why did the LORD wait a whole day? "Tomorrow, we'll do this." And I think the only answer is God is very gracious, isn't He? If you're Achan, do you not, at this point, go, "I'm turning it in. I'm turning it in. We got nailed. Thirty-six people died." And I'm thinking Achan goes, "Well, thirty-six people dead, they're probably going to be turning on me if I maybe if I don't say anything. Maybe it is one out of 2½ million. What is the likelihood of Him finding who I am?" But He gives him the night, if you will. And Israel is taught the seriousness of sin. The guilty party is given the opportunity to make it right - to repent. Pretty consistent with God's nature, in the Bible, that on the one hand, He doesn't allow sin because He wants to bless you; on the other hand, He's a gracious God. I mean, look at David's whole sin with Bathsheba and having her husband killed, and the adultery; two, by the way, Old Testament sins that had attached to them the death penalty. Right? Adultery and murder. And David did this over a year's time, maybe a year and a half. He was out of the limelight. Read Psalm 32 and others where David said.....David is not found in the history books. You find his boy at the king's gate drumming up support, and he ends up leading a revolt against his father because David is now

hiding in his sin. And yet the first words from the prophet to David when he was found out were, "You shall not die" (2 Samuel 12:13). God's gracious. Oh, He's got every reason to (Pastor Jack draws his hand across his neck).....you deserve it. But God is gracious, and I think that had Achan just went, "I don't want to ache anymore," (Laughing) if he'd have done that, I think he'd have been fine. But he doesn't. The odd thing to me is he keeps it to himself. Maybe he thinks he can get away with it. I've yet to find people that are living in sin that think they'll get caught. Look at the way politicians live their lives. "Oh, I'll get away with it." You never get away with it. And if you're God's children, you'll never get away with it. God has a way of just finding you out, and I'm glad that He does so He doesn't leave us out there. But he was going to take his chances - one in 2½ million. "I'm going to take my chances."

Verse 16, "So Joshua rose early in the morning" (you see, now he's wanting to obey) "and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken." (Verse 1 - Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah. Achan. Is he speaking up? No). "He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites;" (verse 1 - the Zarhites - oh, no) "and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken" (verse 1 - the son of Zabdi - uh oh). "Then he brought his household man by man," (and nothing is said by this man) "and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken." I can't imagine this guy just sitting on his hands. I don't know how he felt that night when he went to sleep or how he felt the next morning when the lots began to be cast as the LORD makes His way known. And it goes from tribe to clan or family to household to individual, and it's just coming your way. You can't, "That was a lucky break.....oh, that was two out of three." No, it's coming for you, pal! No admission of guilt, no stepping forward. How amazing sin is to blind you that this guy - you read this, and you go, "What an idiot!" And then we go, "Well, we're idiots a lot like this. Just like this."

Notice it fell on him, and then it was Joshua who speaks up. Verse 19, "Now Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.' And Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils' " (there in Jericho) " 'a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.' "

It's amazing to me that his assessment of God was all wrong, that he didn't admit to it. Verse 22, "So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD." Notice the progression even in verse 21. "I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid." Right? First thing is always you see it, then you want it; if you want it enough, you take it; if you take it, you've got to hide it. That's how sin works. So your best choice is to cut it off at the seeing part. Right? Which is why the Bible talks about not looking at everything around you, covering your eyes, and being careful what you look upon. Guard your heart, guard your eyes, then the enemy doesn't have any place to grab hold of you. But he saw, and he saw a bunch of stuff. "I want that, I want that, and I want that, I want that, too." That's why I always worry when people go, "Did you go shopping?" "Yeah, what'd you do?" "We just window shopped." "Did you buy anything?" "Oh, no." "No, but you're gonna. It's there now." Right? I want, I want, I want, I want, I want, I want. No one can relate to that, I'm sure. Well, verse 22, the LORD then having exposed him, he does cough it up. But, look, he coughed it up way too late. There's no sorrow here. He's caught. You know, it's the prisoner guy who goes, "Are you sorry?" "Yeah, I'm sorry I got caught." Not really sorry. Judas was like that. Judas took the money back. "Sorry. It's not the way I wanted it to work out, but I'm not really sorry. But I'm sorry I got caught. I'm sure sorry it turned out this way." Well that's what Achan does, right? He just kind of coughs it up.

Verse 24 tells us, "Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor." The word "Achor" means hurting, aching. "And Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.' So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day." (At least at the time of the writing). "So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor" (aching) "to this day." So notice in the judgment that Achan and his family and everything they possessed and had stolen from the tents to their possession is taken from them. Right? They took it all away. So, I don't know what he stole, what was valuable in terms of what he had, but he had nothing to show for it now. And you should write over this - sin doesn't just hurt the sinner. You've heard people say that, right? "It's a sin, but nobody's hurt but them." That's never true.

I mean, his family got hurt, the extended family suffered loss. So if we just would listen to God's Word. And had Achan just remembered what the LORD said in the last chapter, he'd have been fine. "Just leave it alone, man. You'll get stuff down the road. But not this time." "Well, I really wanted it." What Achan thought would bring him joy brought him death. The spoils of victory that the Lord brings in your life, you honor Him.

So, 2½ million folks, and they've had two battles, and they're 1-1. They're battin' .500. They've lost thirty-six people plus a whole family. Everyone, I'm sure, is terrified to touch anything at this point. You remember Achan. And you'll always remember this chapter. Achan was achin' because he was disobedient. And they left a heap of stones which I think I told you before Joshua loved leaving heaps of stones around. You'll find him doing that four or five different places. He just puts....."What is this?" "Oh, yeah. That's a different pile....." The valley of trouble or troublesomeness.

So how do we get defeated? Well there're a lot of ways we can certainly lose in battle, but the things we want to remember - we want to remember God already knows. If you're ever living in your sinfulness, and you think you're getting away with it, you should know God already knows. Verse 1 - God knows. Whatever proceeds after that is based upon the knowledge of God. He's explaining it to us because no one knew it, but He knew it. God knows beforehand. That's important. Second of all, be careful of self-confidence when God begins to bless your life because you don't really have what it takes to be victorious. You have a God who makes you that way, but be careful when you transfer His goodness to your strength and somehow feel it belongs to you. Be careful that you don't follow the advice of men. Seek the guidance of God, which means you should pray. Have you ever said to someone, "I don't want to pray, I don't want to bother the Lord with that"? He'd like to be bothered, I'm just telling you. If you have kids at home, and your kids say, "Well, Mom's busy, I don't really want to bother her with that," trust me, your parents want you to bother them. They like that. And so does the Lord. Be careful about hiding sin in the camp, and when God points it out, deal with it before it's too late, or it could be too late. I'm not saying you're not going to get to heaven. I think once God saves you, you'll get to heaven. But there's so much more that God wants to do, maybe, with you beforehand.

So next week we will read about the fall of Ai. It'll actually work out this time. And then the Gibeonites. I hope you'll read ahead. The Gibeonites is a very

interesting problem because the problem of chapter 9 is they didn't learn the lesson in chapter 7. It's only a chapter away; you'd think you could remember. But they didn't.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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