

I remember one afternoon sitting in my hotel room in Basel following the mighty Kettering Town on the internet. It was the league play off final and we were playing Slough whom we had beaten twice during the season. So we duly went 2-0 up but then they scored, then they added another and finally another and we lost 3-2. We had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory!

As we come today to Joshua 7 it seems a bit like that for God's people.

What we have been seeing so far is God's people standing on the edge of the river Jordan ready to go over with their leader Joshua hearing the promise of God that he would give them the land and that God would be with him. In due course God did miraculously stop the flow of the Jordan and allow his people across. Then last week we saw how the huge obstacle of Jericho that walled fortress was removed by God's power. So God's people were on the crest of a wave and all was going well. That is until chapter 7.

### **1. An ignominious defeat v1-5**

As we read these verses we see how the next place on the hit list was Ai. With spies having been sent out it was thought that not all the army was needed and only 3000 were sent but v4 "they were routed by the men of Ai". I mean beaten by a team at least three divisions below them. There was no way Israel should have lost even having put out a weakened team. The after match post-mortem must have been interesting. Looking at the passage we might come up with many reasons for this ignominious defeat. We might say they were complacent or self-confident or lacked prayer but the writer wants us to be in no doubt what was the reason for the defeat.

At the end of Chap 6 we read "So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land". That was the crest of the wave and it was what God had promised Joshua, that he would be with Joshua. Now look at v1 with me, "BUT the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things. Achan son of Carmi the son of Zimri the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel." Then turn the page to v26, "Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of stones which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger."

So let me ask you what was the cause of the defeat of Israel? They were defeated because they were under God's wrath.

Last week Tim Hedgcock speaking about Joshua 5:13 where Joshua asked the commander of the army of the Lord, "are you for us or for our enemies?" Tim mentioned armies in war imagining God was with them. That is not unusual and certainly in WW2 there was much prayer in the churches of this and other countries for God to bring victory and peace with justice. However here God was not for his people because, through sin, they had stepped away from God and become like all the other godless nations around them. They were in a sense no longer God's people under God's rule.

However while we can look at the passage and see what was going on and why Joshua couldn't.

## **2. Joshua's perplexity v6-9**

Following the defeat Joshua turned to God with what appears a mixture of grief and petulance. In v7 we see that what he had to say seems very similar to what was often said in the wilderness, why have you let this happen, we would be better off where we were, we are disgraced, our enemies will destroy us, then what will that say about the great God?

He just can't understand what had happened anymore than I could understand how we had not won the play off final! However while I looked for the proverbial cat to kick Joshua was to be found face down on the floor before the ark, before God and, as one writer puts it "when we are flat on our face before God there is always a way forward".

Joshua has yet to be told the reason as to why this has happened but now God makes it clear to Joshua.

## **3. I will not be with you v10-12**

God made it clear to Joshua v11 that the problem is that "Israel has sinned". God had not let Israel down but the other way, "Israel has sinned". Yes it was Achan who had sinned but see the effect upon the whole people of God!

What is the effect of that sin well we see two effects in these verses. The first is destruction. V12 "they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction." Sin has led to their downfall and destruction and that is in part because of the second effect "I will not be with you any more".

Ouch, the God who has said to Joshua "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Josh 1:5) now says "I will not be with you anymore." Why is that? It is because God is holy and he can have nothing to do with sin. God's people through Achan have broken the covenant and thus have separated themselves from the holy God. Separated from God his people are seen as weak, vulnerable and ineffective.

Friends I hope we can see from this that sin is serious. Jesus thought so and said, "if your hand causes you to sin cut it off" (Mark 9:43). Sin is serious and we see a number of things here. We see that what might seem a small sin has a great effect. Achan's sin in Jericho led to the defeat of Israel at Ai.

I was reading recently about the Jacobite uprising under Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745. How he came down through Scotland defeating the Hanoverian forces at Prestonpans, taking Edinburgh then Carlisle and coming all the way down to Derby before retreating. What caused the retreat was it a massive defeat in battle? Not really, much of it, the historians think, was down to Dudley Bradstreet – who? He was a secret agent of the Hanoverian government of George II. He was allowed into

Charles' war council and spun a load of lies. His piece de resistance was to invent an army of eight thousand men waiting at Northampton. The dismay that this caused an already hesitant council led in the end to their retreat back to Scotland and the defeat of the Stuart forces at Culloden. At the council Charles recognised the power of what Bradstreet said and commented "that fellow will do me more harm than the elector's army". It may be simplistic to say that the lies of one man brought the whole rising down but I hope you can see the comparison with Joshua. One man's sin had great effect even though at the time he did not realise it.

If the fact that sin has great effect is the first thing to note then the second is that sin separates us from God. God can't have anything to do with sin. Some of you may remember Wesley Pegden from Last of the Summer Wine the TV show. Wesley's great delight was tinkering with car engines and as a result he was always in his boiler suit and always filthy so that he was not allowed by his wife Edie into the house or if he was only standing on newspaper.

His state left him unable to enter. What the Bible tells us about sin is that it makes us unfit to be in the presence of God. It puts a barrier between us and God. It separates us. If that situation is not dealt with then, as here, the result is the third effect of sin which is that we experience the wrath of God which results in destruction and that is what we see here

#### **4. God's wrath leads to destruction v13-26**

I know that the rest of the passage makes uncomfortable reading as God sets out to Joshua first how he was to discover who the guilty person was and then the destruction of Achan along with everything he had. It is interesting note that Achan must have known what was going on but said nothing until he had no option. Now it may have been that he didn't really think he had sinned. That is not uncommon. In today's world where moral relativism rules and often people have no clear idea of right or wrong it is easy to tell oneself that what you are doing is not wrong. Many will then live with the idea that they are not sinners. But I think Achan knew only too well what he had done as we look at vs20-21. He acknowledged he had sinned and then said "I coveted, I took, I hid." He broke two of the commandments and God's wrath was on him. As a result not only he but all his family were destroyed. It makes grim reading and I know causes issues for us because we prefer a God of love rather than one of wrath. However the God of the Bible is both and we must not imagine that sin does not matter because it does. Paul makes it clear for us in Rom 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death". Sin has to be taken seriously as does the wrath of God and his judgement on sin.

However we see that once the sin had been dealt with God's people were restored to him and so in 8:1 Joshua was told to go up against Ai "for I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai."

Now we need to see that sin is serious and we need to understand that our God, who is a God of love, is also a holy God who can have nothing to do with sin and therefore reveals his wrath, his righteous anger, against sin but we need to do that in the light of Jesus.

Do you use skype or facetime or one of these modern means of communication? I love skype because it enables me to speak to and see my grandchildren who are the other side of London and my son who is in LA. Twenty years ago it would have been impossible. Computers and the like have revolutionised communication bringing people together across the world.

In terms of dealing with wrath Jesus has totally changed the scene.

God is still implacably opposed to sin and Paul reminds us, “because of these (that is their sins) the wrath of God is coming” (Col 3:6). However there is a difference which Paul spelt out in Romans, “Since we now have been justified by his (Jesus’) blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him.” (Romans 5:9). It is Jesus who is the propitiation for sin, who takes away the wrath of God.

Many of us know this but we need to be clear. God hates our sin and he will judge us for our sin and his wrath will be on us leading to destruction unless that sin is dealt with is removed.

A scoop of vanish may remove every stain but I’m afraid it can’t remove the stain of our sin only the blood of Jesus can do that. Through Jesus’ death we can be forgiven for our sin, we can be made holy and therefore acceptable to God and God’s wrath removed. We need to hear the words in John 3:36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life for God’s wrath remains on him.” As we saw earlier “when we are flat on our face before God there is always a way forward” and, unlike here where God’s wrath was visited immediately on the sinners, now God holds back his wrath to give us time to come to our senses and repent.

Friends I hope we can see from this study how serious sin is, how it affects others, separates us from God and ultimately will bring our destruction as we are separated from God for ever. God doesn’t want that for us and so we need to hear his call to repent and find through the death of Jesus his forgiveness and to do that while there is time. In Jesus failing to recognise our sin and come to God in repentance.

This book of Joshua is about God’s people who were under God’s rule being brought into God’s place. That is the story of the Bible where God wants and through Jesus acts to restore those who through sin were not his people to be his people, a holy people and to bring them under his rule and his blessing and to see them in his place which is heaven. I’ll see you there.