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Combat & Covenant

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Series: Taking Ground  
Joshua 8

## **BIG IDEA – JESUS FINDS US AFTER THE FAILURE AND HELPS US FIGHT AGAIN**

Jesus is still doing what he has always done. He's saving sinners. He's changing lives. He's making disciples. If you would ask, "What do we want Two Cities Church to feel like?" the answer is *changed and transformed lives by Jesus*. It's addictions being broken, marriages being reconciled, people being forgiven and families coming together.

I love the story you just heard, which is one of many stories. It's the story of Conor, and he talks about addiction. I've told you this before, but the word *addiction* is not in your Bible, but the word *slavery* is. That's the biblical word for addiction. If you find yourself in some besetting sin or some addiction, here's what you need to know: you worship your way into sin, so you have to worship your way out. That's the story of Conor.

If you ever find yourself wondering, "How did I get in this sin?" go back, and you'll see that you worshiped your way in, and you need to find something bigger. Actually, no, you need to find someone bigger and someone better than your sin. His name is Jesus. Worship your Savior, and that gets you out of your sin. What you heard in the story of Conor... I don't want us to miss this.

There are always two wings of an airplane when it comes to the Christian faith. There is forgiveness and freedom. Oftentimes, as Christians, we talk a lot about forgiveness. "I'm so grateful Jesus forgives my sin, my past can be forgiven, and my debt can be canceled," but often, we don't want freedom from the sin we want to be forgiven from. A true work of grace in a person's heart says, "I don't want to just be forgiven of

the consequences of sin." Everybody wants that. "I also want to be freed from the sin itself."

Conor was so... It's not easy to be as open and honest and vulnerable as he was. If you caught that really quickly in that video, he mentioned there was a moment in his life where he thought about taking his own life. I've not talked enough about suicide. We're in a moment in our culture where, on the other side of COVID, more and more people, especially young people, are having suicidal thoughts.

Here's what I want to say. In a room this size, my guess is some of you have been there, or maybe you *are* there. We want to be a place where you can talk to us. Here's what you need to know. Maybe you don't know this. If you're talking to someone who's suicidal, this is a good thing to know. When it becomes a concern is not when someone has a suicidal passing thought; it's when someone has gone from having a suicidal thought to a suicidal plan.

"I know how I would do this. I know where I would do this. I've fantasized about what it's going to be like and what life would be like after me and how the people who know me and love me would respond." If you've been there or are there, we want to help you. You can give us the fine china of your life, and we're going to walk with you. We're going to help you have the relationships and the resources you need.

Did you hear the final thing? I hope you heard what Conor said there. He said, "I needed not only to believe; I also needed to belong." That's the whole Christian life. "I needed Christ, obviously, but I also needed community." In fact, it was him seeing his friend, who's also named Connor, get baptized and *his* life change that led to Conor's life being changed.

Let me just say this last thing. As we head toward Easter... I'll tell you a bit more about that next week. We're going to have a Thursday service and a Saturday service and three Sunday services. We're going to celebrate baptisms on Easter. We can think of no better way to celebrate Easter than with baptisms. We can think of no better day to get baptized than on Easter.

There's no better way to show, "I believe in Christ, and I belong to the people of God" than through water baptism. So, if you've not taken that step, we would love to celebrate with you Easter weekend. Let's pray, and then we are going to dive into the longest, most detailed battle in the book of Joshua. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for the story of Conor, just his humility, his honesty, his vulnerability, and his transparency to share about the pains and pressures and problems in his life and what led him to place his faith in you, Lord. We pray to be a place of transformed and changed lives.

We pray that that's what categorizes our homes; when we look back, that's the story of our Community Groups. One of the ways we see that is in baptism, Lord, so I pray for people this Easter, on resurrection weekend, to step forward and publicly profess their faith in Christ and say, "I believe in Christ, and I belong with the people of God." We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Have you ever wanted a second chance? If you're older than 20, the answer should probably be "Yes." It's interesting. The first time someone wants a second chance in life is when they get out of college and realize, "What was I doing in college? If I could go back, I would do something different. I wouldn't have gotten a degree in Russian literature." I wouldn't recommend that.

Or people go back and ask, "Why did I go to college?" The Boomer generation felt like they had to send all of the Millennials to college. Then everyone is like, "Now I just have a lot of debt and a degree I'm not using. What if Mom and Dad would have given me that money and taught me how to rip and flip houses? That would be different."

Sometimes people look back on their career and are like, "Why did I choose *this* career?" A lot of people, as they get older, especially if they're still single, look back on certain romantic relationships and wish they could have a second chance. "Maybe I was a little too picky. I'm older now. Maybe my standards were a little too high."

Sometimes people get to retirement, and it's like... They're 65 or 70, and they're like, "We didn't save enough money for the last 40 years, so now we can't retire" or "We can't retire how we want to" or "I have to keep working." The whole point is we all have these desires in our lives where we cry out for second chances.

Sometimes it's in parenting. Most times it's not the whole time your kids were in the house, but you'll meet somebody, and they'll regret a season with their kids. "I traveled too much when they were young. I regret that in those teenage years I wasn't more involved in the friendships they were making."

Here's the sobering, sad, hard truth to begin with: in most of life, you don't get a second chance. You get one body, and sometimes you make decisions, and you have to live with the implications on your health. You get one first marriage. You get two to four kids. You get one, maybe two, career opportunities in your life.

If you'll turn to Joshua 8, what we're going to see is that Joshua gets a second chance. This is the good news of the gospel. For many Christians, the grace of God is a theological concept. "Oh, I understand it, but I haven't needed to experience it." When you need a second chance, when you've blown it, when your life has fallen apart, when you've sinned grievously, when you get caught, when you get sick...all of these things are going to happen to some of us...you're going to need the grace of God.

Here's the big idea for the whole sermon: *Jesus finds us after the failure and helps us fight again.* I'll show you this. Look at verse 1. **"And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not fear and do not be dismayed.'"** When I started to write this sermon this week... I kind of diagram the text and think, "What am I going to talk about?"

I read the text, and I wrote the first thing down, because I knew I wanted to talk about failure and discouragement. The first thing I wrote down was, "When you fail, turn to God." I thought, "That sounds like a good point. That sounds biblical." And it *is* biblical...except I read the text wrong. It's not that Joshua fails, and then he turns to God. It's that Joshua failed, and then God turned to him. God pursued him. God went after him.

What's interesting is God brings to him the exact same word he brought to him seven chapters earlier. By the way, 366 times in the Bible God says, "Do not fear," but there are only a few instances where he adds this idea of "Do not be discouraged." Now why was Joshua discouraged? Because he just sinned. He just experienced defeat.

We don't know for sure. I'm using my imagination, my sanctified imagination, but here's what I think happened. I think Joshua sinned (we know that from Joshua 7) and that he dealt with it. He repented, he dealt with it, but then he thought something like this: "Okay. God is not angry at me, but I don't know if God is for me." I've felt that before. I don't know if you guys have ever felt like that.

It's like, "Okay. I understand the cross. I know I'm forgiven. I know I'm headed to heaven. I know I'm going to make it through the final judgment, but I've done some really stupid and sinful things, and I'm not sure if God uses people like that anymore." We always say, "God hits a straight shot with a crooked stick." We just don't believe it, especially not in *our* lives.

But that's the testimony of Scripture. Abraham was 70 years old, living in his mom's basement. It's the ultimate "failure to launch" story. God comes to him and says, "You're kind of pathetic, but that's the kind of person I can work through." Then Abraham ends up lying, and God has to work through that.

Moses ends up being angry, and God works through that. David ends up murdering and committing adultery, and God works through that. Peter denies him, and God works through that. Paul, when we first meet him, is a blasphemer and a persecutor, and God works through that. I have three things I want us to see from this text today.

## **01 JESUS CHOOSES AND USES FAILURES**

He doesn't just *use* failures; he *chooses* failures. One reason would be because there's no one else to work through. This is it. That's all we are. The other reason is when God works through a failure, it's obvious that it was God's grace and God's goodness and God is big and we're small and God gets the glory.

So, what I want us to see is a couple of things. First, notice, like I told you before, he gives him the exact same word: "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear. Do not be dismayed." What happens in your life is, as you get older and as you enter into a new season and a new stage... There are many of those. It could be college, and then I'm dating, and then I'm married, and then I have kids in the home, and then I have older kids, and then I'm an empty nester...whatever it is.

In every season and stage of your life, you need to hear the old words from God in a new way. Notice he doesn't come to Joshua and say, "I have a new word for you." "I have the same word for you that you need to re-experience." I'll tell you a story. Tim Keller... You've heard me talk about him. Many of you know who that is. He was a pastor in New York City.

Before he was a pastor in New York City, he was a professor at Westminster Seminary. So, for about 40 years, maybe longer, this guy taught the Bible. Then... Imagine this happening to you. At 70 years old, you go in to the doctor and find out you have stage IV pancreatic cancer. I'm not a doctor, but from everything I know, that's as close to a death sentence as you're going to get.

Imagine this. I don't know what he had to go through...chemotherapy...whatever they have to go through. He said, "I've gotten the news. I'm sitting on my hospital bed, reading the Bible, and for the first time, the resurrection was real to me." Dude, he probably taught a seminary class on the resurrection. He probably understands every place in the Bible where the resurrection is talked about, but what he didn't ever have before was "I'm dying soon. My body is falling apart, and the only hope I have is the resurrection."

This has happened a couple of times in our church, but about two or three months ago, we had an older guy in our church. He reached out to us and said, "Hey, guys, can all of the elders in the church pray for me and anoint me with oil? I'm really sick." We said, "Yeah, of course. What service can you come to? Let's do this." There's a verse in James that says, "If you're sick, call the elders and anoint them."

So, we're back in the room back there, and he's there, and I'm leading the time. I said a couple of words, and I asked him how to pray for him and all that. I said, "Is there anything you'd like to say?" As you guys know, most of the pastors in our church are pretty young. We're all young men, and they're praying for this older man. He looks at

us and says, "Years ago, when I was a young man, I read this verse. 'If you're sick, call people to pray for you.'" He said, "Today I need this verse."

I don't know what word you're going to need. This is why you're going to want to know the Word of God. There will be a moment where you're going to need to know, "There's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ." There's going to be a day you're going to need that word. There's going to be a day where the word "I will never leave you or forsake you" will be very sweet to you.

What Joshua needs to learn is multiple lessons from his failure. By the way, the Bible says failure can be a good thing. There's this interesting text in Ecclesiastes. It says, "It's better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of laughter." I'll tell you how I've seen this as a pastor. I used to do a ton of weddings. I don't do as many weddings anymore, but my preference is to always do a funeral over a wedding.

I don't want to do funerals, but if it's like, "Hey, you can only choose one. What are you going to do?" it's 100 percent the funeral. Every time I've ever spoken at a wedding, no one is listening to what I'm saying. They're like, "Is it an open bar? Is there a live band? What food will they have here? Oh, the couple looks so cute." No one is listening. When you're at a funeral, everybody is leaning in.

I mean, people don't even know it. They're saying something like, "There's something I need to learn here. There's something I don't know." Failure can be a great teacher. They've said (you've probably heard this) the worst type of failure is succeeding in that which does not matter, which defines most of Americans. They're shallow and surface level, and they're succeeding in that which doesn't matter, which makes them prideful and feel like they don't need God.

If you continue on, you'll see another lesson Joshua has to learn. We're continuing in verse 1. ***"Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land."*** The second thing Joshua has to learn is that what God wants to do God wants to do through all of his people.

What happened with Joshua, if you go back to chapter 7, which we talked about two weeks ago... You have this situation where Joshua only sent a few people. Remember? He didn't send all of God's people. Here's the principle. I don't need to talk about this for long. What God wants to do he wants to do through all of us. What we need in the church, based on this text, is an army culture, not an audience culture.

What happened is after the Reformation, which happened in the 1500s, there became the professionalization of occupations. Medicine became professionalized, which was kind of cool. You started to go to school, and you started to wear the white coat.

You're a professional. Great. Then law said, "We should probably do something like that too." So you go to law school. Then the church said, "We should do that." What happened was the professionalization of ministry.

What ends up happening in that kind of culture is there's an audience that comes to watch the professionals. I heard one guy say when the church is not working well, it's like a professional football game. There are 22 professionals on the field, dying of exhaustion and needing rest, and there are a hundred thousand people in the stands needing exercise.

I thank God that's not the culture of our church, but it's a great reminder that what God wants to do he wants to do through all of us. Here's what that means. We say it *this* way here. We want you to be on mission, just like I'm trying to be on mission and our staff is trying to be on mission, wherever you live, learn, work, and play, and you do it two ways: by ministering out of your life stage and your lifestyle.

Your *life stage* is just you have to know yourself. You're like, "I'm single" or "I'm married with young kids in the house" or "I'm an empty nester." Okay. That's your life stage. Minister out of it. In certain life stages you'll have more time. In a certain life stage, you find when your kids are in the home, it's like, "Oh my goodness. My main place of ministry is going to be my kids' sporting events. I never knew that. That's my life stage."

Then your *lifestyle* is what you like to do. "I like to drink coffee." "I like to work out at the gym." "I like to cook." "I'm under 30, so I play pickleball all the time." You know what I mean? Whatever your lifestyle and your life stage are, you minister out of that. Then there's another thing he needs to learn. He needs to learn to wait. Look at this.

**Verse 2: "And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."** Here's what's interesting. God says in the battle of Ai, "You can keep the plunder."

I showed you this a few weeks ago, but in the battle at Jericho, he says, "No, no, no. All the gold, all the silver, all the bronze, all the iron... Give it all to me. I want all of the first." Then he says at Ai, "Keep all of it. You guys can keep it." It made me think of Achan. I don't know if you've ever had this thought as you were reading this. "Wait a second. If Achan would have waited one more battle, he could have had the gold and silver without having to try to steal and hide it."

I heard a mentor say one time there are three elements to obeying God. He said, first of all, you have to find out what God said. You just read the Bible. You go, "That's great," and you go, "I want to do this." Then you run off because you're excited to try

to do it, and then you go, "Oh, I forgot to look at *how* God wants me to do this." So, God first gives us *what*, and then he gives us *how*, and *how* is always the opposite of how you think it's going to be.

Then he said the final thing God often will reveal to us is *when*. When is the right time? It's not just *what*, it's not just *how*; it's *when*. It's not just God's Word and God's way; it's God's timing. Sometimes sin is wanting something God is going to give us but wanting it too early. Many people get in a lot of sexual trouble because they want sex but not according to God's Word, not according to God's way, and not according to God's timeline.

## **02 WE NEED TO CONTINUE TO MOVE FORWARD AND FIGHT AFTER THE FAILURE**

So, here's what happens. He learns from this failure, but then I want you to see the next thing that happens in verse 3. The battle begins. ***"So Joshua and all the fighting men arose to go up to Ai. And Joshua chose 30,000 mighty men of valor and sent them out by night."***

The second thing I want you to see is that Jesus helps us fight the battle after the failure. So, he finds us after the failure, and then he's going to help us fight the battle. Now, when I was first reading this text, I was like, "What am I going to say about this?" because it's 27 verses in a row of a detailed combat battle.

Then I started thinking, "Wait. Most of the Bible is..." Well, a lot of the Old Testament is battles. The first battle in the Bible is between Satan and Adam and Eve. That shows up early. If you go to Genesis 4, after Cain kills Abel, we get the lineage of Cain, and if you read a couple of verses down into "He begat him, and he begat him, and he begat him..." From Cain's lineage, you get a couple generations, and it says, "So-and-so, who made weapons of warfare."

Okay. In Genesis 4, there's already an industry for weapons of warfare. In Genesis 14, we have the first battle in the Bible. So, battles show up early. I know some of the ladies, especially, are like, "I don't like all the soldier imagery." Well, ladies, the men have to put up with being the bride of Christ. We each have imagery that makes us feel a little uncomfortable at times.

What I want us to see from this battle is a couple of principles. Maybe the first principle over all of these principles is that every battle is different. That's why I can't abstract too many things from this battle. If you go to the battle at Jericho versus the battle at Ai (so, chapter 6 versus chapter 8), they're completely different battles.



Jericho was a miraculous battle where God does all the work. In the battle at Ai, they do all the work, humanly speaking.

The battle at Jericho happens at day. The battle at Ai happens at night. In the battle at Jericho, they're told to do one thing. In the battle at Ai, they're told to do four things. Maybe here's the principle: every battle in your life is going to be different, and there's no formula. A lot of times, people want a recipe. "Give me the recipe for lust. Give me the recipe for a good marriage." Sorry, there's no recipe. There's a cookbook. If you want to have the whole Bible and read all of it...

By the way, how do you deal with battles that are all different? The Word of God and wise counsel. I need passages and people. I need books I can read and people who can read me. That's what I need. It's Word of God and wise counsel, two wings of the airplane. What I will do is try to show us what I think are three or four helpful principles from this battle that help us fight the battle we have against sin.

The first one shows up in verse 4. Let me show you this. Verse 4: ***"And he commanded them, 'Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you remain ready.'"*** The first principle is when you fight the battle in your life against sin, you need to *ambush your sin*. Maybe you've never thought about that.

What does the ambush mean? I surprise attack it, and I hit it with all I can. Are you still dealing with the exact same sin in the exact same way that you've been dealing with it for months or years or, for some of us, maybe decades? It's because you have not ambushed your sin. What does *ambush* mean? It means a surprise attack. Let me ask you this: What does your sin not expect you to do?

It's kind of weird to talk about sin as personified, but that's the way the Bible talks about it. One of the first mentions of sin in the Bible is when God says to Cain, "Cain, sin is crouching at your door, and its desire is to have you." It's like, "Yikes!" That's the personification of sin. What could you do that would surprise your sin? Let me give you two things. Whenever I meet somebody who's still stuck in their sin, they have usually not done these two things.

The first is they've not taken *extreme measures*. In my biblical counseling class I took in seminary, I learned that when someone is dealing with sin, the first thing you do is make sure everybody is safe, because there could be some kind of sin where it's not safe. Like, they're harming themselves or harming someone else. But after you deal with the issue of safety, the next thing you do if somebody is stuck in a sin is you say extreme measures.

I know you might say, "You pray about it." No, no, no. "Don't you read your Bible?" No. "Don't you journal about it?" No. You do an extreme measure so you can give yourself the space to read your Bible and pray and journal about it and come up with a plan. An extreme measure is... Well, it's in the name. It's extreme.

Back when I was in college (I'm going to date myself here), there was not yet Wi-Fi. I know. We rode our dinosaurs to college. It was a long time ago. I remember there was a guy on my hall, a good Christian brother, but struggling pretty severely with pornography.

One night, I hear a knock on my dorm, and I open up the door, and it's my friend. He goes, "Here," and it was his Ethernet cable. Some of you go, "What is that?" Back in the day, you had to plug a cable into your computer, and then plug it into the wall to get the Internet.

I remember, when he gave it to me, going, "This feels extreme. You're not going to have the Internet in your dorm? You're going to have to go to the library every time you want to answer..." There were no smartphones. "You just made your..." That's what an extreme measure does. "You just made your life a lot more difficult." Extreme measures feel extreme.

When you're about to do them, you and your wife are like, "We probably shouldn't even tell our parents, because we're about to pull our daughter out of school, and it feels crazy, but her friends are destroying her life, and we have to do something." It's like when the wife and the husband are like, "We're the couple that needs professional counseling." There's nothing wrong with that, but people will feel like there is.

"That's who we are. We need to go public and pay money and sit with a professional, because our Community Group leader cannot help us with this. This knot needs deeply untied." "I need to go to some 12-step program." You get it. You understand why people don't do this stuff. Because it's extreme. We keep telling ourselves why we don't need to do it.

The second thing is *accountability*. By the way, sometimes the extreme measure is the accountability as well. Accountability doesn't work unless it's welcomed. We've all been in accountability groups where everybody is lying to everybody, and everybody is hoping you won't ask the question that needs to be asked, and everybody is really vague in their answers. That's not what we're talking about.

We're talking about accountability that's welcomed and invited. Here's the thing. Most sins that people are addicted to and that are besetting and secret... There's

shame connected to the sin. This is why the person closest to the person finds out last. It's not only that they're trying to be deceitful. They've thought about telling you.

You've been there sometimes. "Who could I tell who's close enough to me who could help me but won't completely judge me and destroy our relationship?" You need accountability with somebody who's farther ahead of you. We all want accountability with a person who also struggles. "Hey, you also struggle with this. Let's see who can struggle less this week." It doesn't work.

The first thing you have to do is ambush your sin. The second thing you have to do is *get creative*. Look at verse 5. **"And I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us just as before, we shall flee before them."** Again, I have to keep going back to chapter 7.

In chapter 7, when they get beat up and lose 36 guys, if you remember the story, they retreat. They're fleeing from the battle, and Ai gets them, attacks them, and kills 36 of them. So, what Joshua is saying is, "Hey, guys, let's trick them." I mean, I don't know how else to understand this text. This is clearly a "Let's fool, prank, deceive, get creative with this battle."

Here's my question: What do you have to do to get creative to fight your sin? What you're going to find is that the deeper in sin you are, the more creative you will get at doing the sin. You become like an expert. You become like a professional. You're like, "I know where to hide it. I know where to buy it. I know what browser to open. I know how to clean it afterward. I know what to say I was doing while I was doing it."

You will wake up one day a year or two into something, and you'll go, "How did I become so good at this sin?" You need to use the same creativity to fight the sin. Some of you... If it's into making money, you get super creative. You're the most creative person we've ever met. When it comes to fighting your sin, you are boring.

I thought about this. I thought, "Who is being creative today?" Do you know who I thought of? Because I thought, "Who's crafty and creative?" Jesus tells us to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. We only obey half that verse. We're just innocent as doves. Most Christians are nice and naïve. Jesus says, "Be innocent and innovative."

I thought of the *Babylon Bee*. Does anyone know who the... I'm hoping maybe half of you... Google it afterward if you don't know who they are. The *Babylon Bee* is a group of Jesus-loving, Bible-believing Christians who started a satirical news site, and it has taken off. I don't know that they articulate it this way, but this is how I understand what they did.

They were trying to figure out, "How do we deal with a goofy culture that is full of ideology, that's full of wrong beliefs and terrible behaviors?" and somebody said, "Let's make fun of them." I laugh at almost every *Babylon Bee* article. It's so clever. Do you know that the *Babylon Bee* made fun of some of the goofiness of the gender ideology and got kicked off Twitter? This was a while ago.

Elon Musk liked the *Babylon Bee* and saw them get kicked off Twitter, and that's ultimately why Elon Musk bought Twitter. Who would have thought a few Christian guys going, "Let's make fun of this" would create something where Elon Musk spends \$42 billion to buy Twitter? We have to get creative.

Thirdly, we have to *know our enemy*. What he's going to say here... He's going to know what they're going to do. Look at verse 6. ***"And they will come out after us, until we have drawn them away from the city. For they will say, 'They are fleeing from us, just as before.' So we will flee before them. Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand."***

Basically, what I'm trying to show you here is, if you read the text, Joshua knows what the enemy is going to do. The only good thing we can say about Satan is he's utterly predictable. He's like the Eagles. He's living off his old hits. I mean, think about it. If you do a study of the temptations of Adam and Eve, they were the temptation to have, the temptation to be, and the temptation to feel.

Then you go over and look at the three temptations of Jesus in the desert. They were the temptation to have, the temptation to be, and the temptation to feel. Then you realize, "Okay. I guess the major three temptations in life are sex, status, and salary." Power, possessions, position, pleasure... I mean, there are not that many. There are thousands of variations of those temptations, but let's be honest. There are just a few major temptations that we all know we're going to face.

In fact, if I were to get up here and say, "Hey, guys, I have bad news. There was a pastor in Wyoming" or "There was a politician in Nebraska, and he had a moral failure," what are you going to think? You're going to think one of four things. It's like, "I know how this happens. Let me guess. Was it sexual in nature? Was he addicted to something? What did he do financially? Was it abuse?" There might be a couple of other categories.

Here's what's interesting. The apostle Paul has this interesting text in either 1 or 2 Corinthians. He goes, "We are not unaware of Satan's schemes." This is what he writes to the church. Unfortunately, we *are* sometimes, guys. Paul wasn't. Unfortunately, we are.

Let me ask you a question that was asked to me. I was at this event with some pastors probably a month ago now. I don't know if you're ever at one of those events, and you're sitting in a circle with some guys, and somebody asks a question, and you're like, "I don't really want to answer this question. It's a little too deep. I want to keep things a little more surface and shallow, please."

One of the pastors asked... There were about five or six of us, and he said, "Okay. You guys are not in full-time ministry in five years. What happened?" We probably talked for just about an hour. Here's what I've found. Let me ask *you* this. In five years you've wrecked your life. Satan got ahold of you, and you became the worst version of yourself, and you were given over to your sins.

Here's the question: What happened? Most people... Maybe not the moment I say it, but if you had an hour with a journal and you could be honest and no one would ever read it (all of those little airbags), you would know how you're going to fall apart. Or you're just (and I don't mean this in a mean way) completely self-unaware. Most people know, "I like alcohol too much. That's how I'd fall apart." Most people know, "It's a love of money that could destroy my life and wreck my family."

People know, "It's the lady at work who's younger than me who I've been being way too nice to, and this could really get..." People know. You know how your life would fall apart. The hard thing is admitting it, if only to yourself, and then doing something about it to put some borders up, boundaries up, barriers up, so that doesn't happen. As soon as you decide to do that, the worst part of you will not want to do that. It's like, "What's wrong?"

Which leads to the final thing we need to learn from this battle. We need to learn how to *set the city on fire*. Look at verse 8. ***"And as soon as you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire. You shall do according to the word of the LORD. See, I have commanded you."***

Here's what he tells them. You know, you have to know your enemy. We talked about that. You have to be creative. We talked about that. He says you have to set the city on fire. It's like, "Yikes! Sounds kind of intense. Can we keep some of it? I know we can keep the plunder, but we have to set everything else on fire?"

The idea is you have to get rid of it all. The Bible says... The old English way of saying it is *mortify* our sin. Kill it. We like to manage our sin. "Let's keep it somewhat small but around so I can grab it if I need it." We're told to kill sin. We like to slap it, maybe punch it, maybe kick it. We don't really want to kill it.

There's this imagery. You'll see this in a minute, because he's going to say, "Kill the king." God commands him to do four things. *Ambush the city*. Done. Check. *Get the*

*plunder. Check. Burn the city. He's about to do that. And kill the king.* The last two are about getting to the heart of something. The temptation in our lives is to leave part of our sin undealt with, and we kind of nurse it.

I have a friend, and he pastors in New York City. Obviously, that's a very interesting place to live. There are a lot of things that happen in New York City. He said there was a guy in his church... Imagine this happening to you. Or, ladies, imagine this happening to your husband or your brother or somebody. He has a guy in his church, a successful business guy, single...a good-looking business guy. He walks out of the investment bank, and there's an escort. He described her as the most beautiful woman he has ever seen.

She walked up to him, put her card on his chest, and I can't tell you what she said to him, but I can give you the euphemism. "Call me. I will give you the time of your life, and you will never forget it." The guy said it took him three years to throw the card away. He never called. It took him three years. I don't know where he kept it. I don't know how often he looked at it. What have you been holding on to that you need to set on fire?

Joshua goes. He fights the battle. Verse 9 says, ***"So Joshua sent them out. And they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai, but Joshua spent that night among the people."*** Notice Joshua is fighting the battle with the people. In fact, a careful reading will show you that Joshua is doing the most difficult work.

The temptation the more you're in leadership and the more status you have and the more influence you have and the more power you have is to not be a part of hard things. A careful reading will show you that he's doing the hardest work. He's letting the other group go ambush. That's the fun part. He's doing the fleeing. This is the "I hope I'm fast enough" job.

He's with the guys, saying, "I'm not going to ask you to do something I'm not going to do," because leaders can't point the way; they have to lead the way. It's a testimony to Joshua's character and the lessons he has learned because of his failure. So, verses 10-17 are the battle, and then in verse 18, something interesting happens.

***"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.' And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. And the men in the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and captured it. And they hurried to set the city on fire."***

***So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city, and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai.***

***And the others came out from the city against them, so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side. And Israel struck them down, until there was left none that survived or escaped. But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him near to Joshua."***

Very similar principle. I don't really have anything new to say about this. The killing of the king and the burning of the city are communicating the same thing. We have to get to the nucleus, the locus, the nerve center of our sin, and we have to deal with the heart of it. We have to cut off the head of it. That's the imagery here of the king being killed. If you look at verse 29, it says what Joshua did.

***"And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day."***

### **03 AFTER THE WAR, WE NEED TO WORSHIP**

There are three things I want us to see. The first is that Jesus chooses and uses failures. We saw that. The second is that he helps us fight after the failure, and we learned the lessons there. The third is that we need renewal, both after failure and success. If you'll look in your Bible, in verses 30-35... There are usually subtitles for sections in your Bible. They're not inspired. Humans who organized the Bible... They just try to tell you what the section is about.

You'll see it's called something like "Corporate Renewal" or "Covenant Renewal." It's interesting that this chapter... After they're done, they're going to do something that in war strategy makes no sense. They're going to stop. They still have many enemies. They're going to stop. They're going to slow down. They're going to celebrate together. This is called *renewal*.

Now, renewal is different than revival. *Renewal* is something we can bring by the grace of God. It's something we can ask God for. It's something we can personally experience. *Revival* comes and goes, and God is sovereign and brings it. I don't know

if you've seen recently (hopefully some of you or most of you have) what happened at Asbury, the Asbury revival.

I have a friend who went there. He said, "First of all, when I went there and walked into the room, it felt like a bad Baptist service from 1990." Then he said, "I realized it's a revival for Generation Z." Generation Z has been overly stimulated. Everything is big and loud and social media and filtered. God is bringing a simple revival for Gen Z. He said, "I climbed up into the balcony, and 6 hours felt like 10 minutes." Amazing.

We love revival. I'd encourage you at some point to see *Jesus Revolution*. I went and saw it in theaters. It's about the Jesus Movement of the 70s and what God was doing among the hippies. The whole Calvary Chapel movement, which is one of the greatest movements of the twentieth century... If you ever see a Calvary Chapel church, it came out of this movement.

The leader of that movement was a guy named Chuck Smith. Many people think he was more influential than Billy Graham, but just no one knows about him. There's this moment in the movie (this is all true) where a guy from *TIME* magazine flies in because he doesn't understand what's happening with the hippies. He meets with Chuck Smith, and they go down to Pirate's Cove.

Pirate's Cove was where they would do all of their baptisms. They still do baptisms there to this day. They go down to Pirate's Cove, and the guy from *TIME* magazine walks up to Chuck Smith and says, "I heard you're baptizing hippies here. How many hippies are you baptizing?" Chuck Smith goes, "About a thousand a week." A thousand a week. That's revival.

Renewal has two components. Tim Keller, who I'm quoting twice in this sermon, I guess... He studied this, and he said renewal always has two components. First, a *rediscovery of the gospel*. Sin and grace become real and personal to you in a new way. Secondly, *corporate prayer*. Those are the two components of renewal.

He said in corporate prayer, it's not just coming together and praying, although Christians don't do that enough. He said renewal comes when you pray for lost people with passion and confess your sins publicly. Those are the two things that, when we come together, people do the least, usually. We might give a nod to our lost friends. We're not going to cry about them. We may, maybe, if we're feeling uniquely spiritual, confess a safe sin to somebody.

I want us to end by seeing the renewal that happens here. In verse 30, it says this: "**At that time** [after the war] **Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal...**" We'll come back to why there. "**...just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of**



***Moses, 'an altar of uncut stones...' Why that? "...upon which no man has wielded an iron tool."***

The whole point is man will add no effort to his salvation. That's the symbolism of this altar. ***"And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written."*** He's putting the written Word of God back in the center of the people of Israel's lives.

***"And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel."***

Basically, here's the image. There are these two... They're really more like hills. We call them *mountains*, but they look more like hills. There are these two hills, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. They are the immediate center of the geography of Israel. They're the very center of Israel's geography.

In the middle is this little valley called *Shechem*. He puts half the people on *this* side and half the people on *that* side. One mountain, Mount Gerizim, was the mount of blessing, and Mount Ebal was the mount of cursing. What's interesting, and probably surprising to the people, was he put the altar on the mount of cursing.

He was trying to communicate something. The place of sacrifice needs to be where the place of sin was. There needs to be a sacrifice where there has been sin. What a great picture of the gospel. Then, as the final part of renewal, he reads the Word to them. Look at what it says here. I want you to see how often the word *all* is used.

***"And 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 commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them."***

Part of the way renewal happens is when you put the Word of God back at the center of the church and say, "We are committing to teach all of God's Word to all of God's people." We say here it takes the whole Bible to make the whole Christian. The great temptation in churches and with pastors is to teach some of God's Word to all of God's people.

The reason we walk through books of the Bible... This week, I was like, "Oh man, we're talking about war for an hour." It's just a commitment to say, "Let's teach all of

the Bible to all of God's people, and let's trust him to see what happens." I don't know where you guys are with all this, but if we end where we began... I don't know where you feel like you need a second chance.

If you're young, you may feel like nowhere yet, but there will be a time in your life where you're going to feel like you need a second chance, and you're going to feel like you're a failure. Hopefully in that moment you're going to remember this story, and you're going to remember the grace of God in Joshua.

Basically, what I've seen is if you don't have Jesus to go to with your failures, you tend to do one of two things. You tend to either bury your failure or blame your failure on other people. You go, "I can't ever tell anybody about what I did in college" or "I can't tell anybody about this addiction."

"I can't tell anybody about how messed up my marriage is. It has to go deep. I have to lie to myself about it. I have to avoid it. I have to avoid people who ask me about it. I have to set my whole life up to avoid my failures." That's one option. The other option people do is they blame everybody else.

Millennials love to blame their parents. We blame our genetics. We blame our spouse. We blame our job. We blame our boss. The answer, according to the Bible, for failure is not to bury it and not to blame it, but to say, "I believe God can do something in and through this."

Here's the truth. We've talked about needing a second chance, and that's great. We believe here in a second chance and a third chance and a twenty-seventh chance and a fifty-fifth chance. What you'll need in life (and you'll know this) is more than just a second chance. Do you know the guy in the Bible who got the ultimate second chance? His name was Noah.

I mean, is there a better second chance than "We're going to start over with you and your family"? That's the ultimate second chance. "Nobody else is here. Just eight of you. Get off the ark." What does Noah do within two days? He's drunk. We need more than a second chance. We need more than a chance to do it again. We need someone to do it for us. Jesus Christ comes, and he is our great substitute who lives the life we can't live, who dies and is our sacrifice in the place of our sin.

Do you remember the battle? I didn't talk about it a lot, but there's this moment where it says Joshua holds up the javelin. That's kind of the moment of victory in the whole battle. Well, today, we don't hold up the javelin; we hold up the cross of Jesus Christ. We say, "Because of what Jesus Christ has done, we are no longer fighting *for* victory; we are fighting *from* victory."

What we're going to do in just a minute... I'm going to pray. We're going to sing a song, and then we're going to take Communion. Communion is basically us trying to do verses 30-35. It's us trying to remember and renew our hearts again. Verses 30-35 are actually what Moses writes them and tells them to do in Deuteronomy 27.

What Jesus tells us to do at the end of all of the Gospels and what the apostle Paul tells us to do when he writes to the Corinthians... He says, "Take this cup. Take this bread. Do this often in remembrance of Christ." I pray that this would be a time, as we're going to take Communion in a few minutes, where you, in a new way, personally rediscover the gospel and where you are encouraged and invigorated to fight your next battle not *for* victory but *from* victory. Let's pray.

Lord, we talked about a lot from an interesting text on fighting a battle today. The truth is the Promised Land we see in the book of Joshua is the problem land for people and that our lives... We're not to heaven yet, and there are many battles to fight. Some people in here are feeling like they're fighting a battle in their marriage. Some people are fighting a battle personally.

Some people are fighting a battle with their kids. Some people feel like they're fighting a health battle. Lord, whatever it is, I pray that you would help these principles to go deep into our hearts. So many of us have fought a battle before, and we failed. I pray that you would help us to get back up. The Bible says in the book of Proverbs, "A righteous person falls seven times, but he gets back up."

It's not how many times you fall; it's how many times you get back up. Would you help us to get back up by the grace of God? Would you help us to be renewed, even as we go into a time of Communion? As Martin Luther said, would you make it as if Jesus Christ died yesterday, rose today, and is coming back tomorrow? Would you make it that real and near to us? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.