

JOSHUA 8:1-29
VICTORY IN THE LORD!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Joshua chapter 8 as we continue our study through this book, and we look at victorious Christian living or living that Spirit-filled life!

Let me give you a little introduction that will help lead up to what we will be looking at this morning.

The children of Israel are in the Promise Land or the land of Canaan and they had their first victory over a mighty enemy, the city of Jericho.

Next in line was the city of Ai and it was not a very strong city and thus, because of pride or whatever, they did not seek the Lord on this one.

They sent some spies to take a look at what they needed to get this victory against Ai, and they came to the conclusion that they did not need very many men, maybe some three thousand to get this victory.

But again, they did not seek the Lord on this one, this was a plan that they came up with on their own.

Another thing they didn't do was seek what was in their heart, they did not do a heart check.

Why was that important? Because there was sin in the camp of Israel and, because they did not seek the Lord, they did not do a heart check, and they were on their own!

Remember what the Bible tells us about sin, **“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”** Isaiah 59:1-2.

Sin in the camp of Israel brought them defeat against Ai. Listen to what took place. In Joshua 7:4-5, **“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; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.”**

Not only that but listen to what we are told in Joshua 7:12, the reason for their defeat. We are told, **“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. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.”**

The Lord was not with them in this battle and they were defeated! And the Lord tells them that He will not fight with them until they destroy the accursed thing from among you! Sin will keep us in defeat when God wants to give us the victory, if we would only destroy those accursed things, those sins in our lives.

You don’t play with sin; you don’t entertain sin; you destroy sin and that is what the children of Israel had to do. If you don’t deal with sin, it will slowly consume your life and it will eventually destroy you and even those around you!

Let me explain it like this. We are told,

Walking through a park, I passed a massive oak tree. A vine had grown up along its trunk. The vine started small - nothing to bother about. But over the years the vine had gotten taller and taller. By the time I passed, the entire lower half of the tree was covered by the vine's creepers. The mass of tiny feelers was so thick that the tree looked as though it had innumerable birds' nests in it.

Now the tree was in danger. This huge, solid oak was quite literally being taken over; the life was being squeezed from it. But the gardeners in that park had seen the danger. They had taken a saw and severed the trunk of the vine - one neat cut across the middle.

The tangled mass of the vine's branches still clung to the oak, but the vine was now dead.

That would gradually become plain as weeks passed and the creepers began to die and fall away from the tree. How easy it is for sin, which begins so small and seemingly insignificant, to grow until it has a strangling grip on our lives. And yet, Christ's death has cut the power of sin. Yes, the "creepers" of sin still cling and have some effect. But sin's power is severed by Christ, and gradually, sin's grip dries up and falls away.

- J. Alistair Brown

Don't let sin consume your life, cut it out, crucify the flesh and walk in the holiness that God desires and see the victories that He will give to you. I am not saying we are going to be perfect, without sin, we will not in this life. But whatever you are feeding will be manifested in your life.

If you feed the flesh, then that flesh nature will be manifested in your life. If you feed the Spirit, then the fruit of the Spirit will be manifested in your life and the fruit of the Spirit is

LOVE!

Now we still have to deal with this battle against Ai, they are still out there, they have not been defeated yet. But, as we will see, God has a plan and the victory will be seen if they obey the Lord.

I have broken down these verses here in Joshua chapter 8 as follows:

INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE LORD – JOSHUA 8:1-2

JOSHUA INSTRUCTS THE PEOPLE – JOSHUA 8:3-8

OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD'S INSTRUCTIONS – JOSHUA 8:9-13

THE VICTORY AGAINST AI – JOSHUA 8:14-29

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Joshua chapter 8, starting in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we look at this topic of – ***VICTORY IN THE LORD!***

JOSHUA 8

VERSES 1-2

I think if you have been a Christian for any period of time, you have found out that the Christian life is a series of battles that we face with the enemy.

And the *secret* to victory, if you want to call it that, depends on how close we are walking with the Lord! God wants to give us the victory, but that victory is always found in Him and not apart from Him!

Now, in knowing that we will face these battles, in the things that you have encountered in your life as a Christian, have you ever experienced a setback or defeat in a battle you have faced?

Of course you have, of course I have. We will encounter these in our life! What should we do with them? We should use them as lessons to learn from!

The problem that many Christians have is that when they face these setbacks, when they face these defeats, they just want to give up, they don't want to fight any longer, they are not going to even try! That is the worst thing you can do!

I like the way that Phillip Keller put it. He wrote, ***“[When we fail] the opportunity for progress remains open to us. But the fact remains that the recovery of lost ground is always painful and costly. Still we put our hand in God’s hand and press on.”***

In other words, walk with God, stay close to Him, put your hand in His because He is not giving up and neither should you!

Think about a child who is learning to walk. And as they are learning they stumble, they fall, they may even get a little dirty!

What does the parent do?

Well, I will tell you what a parent won't do first! They won't mock the child, laugh at the child, put the child down. They won't call him “Loser!” That just isn't what a parent does.

What happens is when the child falls the parent runs over to the child and picks the child up, hugs the child, encourages the child, loves the child. But it does not end there. Then the parent puts the child on the ground and encourages the child to walk again!

Did the child fail at their attempt at walking?

You bet they did!

But the parent did not give up on them

Do we, as Christians, stumble and fall?

You bet we do!

And our loving Father is right there encouraging us, picking us up, He helps us to walk again!

And for the children of Israel, they just stumbled big time as they lost their first battle against Ai and they lost some thirty-six men in that battle they were defeated in!

And after this defeat, after they repented and dealt with the sin that was in the camp, notice what the Lord tells Joshua, **“Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed . . .”**

What encouragement from the Lord and that is what the Lord will do in our lives if we will look to Him!

Yes, they failed but now it was time to get up and move on and obey what the Lord is telling them.

And that is my first point here – ***INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE LORD!***

And this is important. When we lose ground, as they did with Ai. When we fail, like they did with Ai. We need to know how to get back on track so we can gain that victory once again!

And like I have said, the thing we need to do is deal with the sin in our life, repent before God and then move forward.

That is what Paul said in Philippians 3:12-14, **“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”**

It is good to understand where you stand as a Christian and Paul understood this perfectly.

Notice what he said, “**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected . . .**”

For Christians who think that they have already attained a certain holiness, that they are perfected, that is just pride!

Paul understood that God was still working in his life and he had more work to be done in his life and that work will continue on until he went home to be with the Lord!

And the same is true for us. If we don't see this then we will tend to be very prideful and look down upon others. And look out, you are heading for a fall!

Let me also say this. Yes, Paul had not already attained this perfection, but he did not mope around in his condition, but he ***PRESSED ON!***

Yes, we can get discouraged, we can get frustrated at the things we do or don't do. The past is the past and you have to press on, you have to move forward.

If you dwell upon your failures, you will be a mess! Paul said this in regard to what he did, “**. . . forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**”

Don't live in the past, learn from the past and move on, keeping your eyes upon Jesus. Keep focused on the finish line.

God wants to give us the victory and thus, look to Him and see the salvation that He will bring to the situations you are facing!

And notice the difference here in Joshua chapter 8.

This is not Joshua's plan but the Lord's. He is doing the leading and it is the Lord who will give them the victory.

And folks, the "Victory in the Christian life is not in the absence of conflict but the presence and protection of God in the midst of conflict."

That is what the children of Israel were learning and what we need to learn!

And listen to what the Lord told Joshua, "**. . . 'Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it.'**"

The first time they did battle against Ai they did not seek the Lord and they lost that battle!

Now they are seeking direction from the Lord and as they follow the Lord, they will see the victory He will give to them against Ai!

Hearing and obeying is so important when it comes to the Lord! Let me show you what I mean.

We are told,

Robert Kupferschmid was an 81-year-old with no flying experience. However, due to a tragic emergency, he was forced to fly an airplane.

On June 17, 1998, he and his 52-year-old pilot friend, Wesley Sickle, were flying from Indianapolis to Muncie, Indiana. During the flight, the pilot slumped over and died at the controls.

The Cessna 172 single-engine plane began to nose-dive and Kupferschmid grabbed the controls. He got on the radio and pleaded for help.

Nearby were two pilots who heard the call. Mount Comfort was the closest airport, and the two pilots gave Kupferschmid a steady stream of instructions of climbing, steering, and - the scariest part - landing.

The two experienced pilots circled the runway three times before this somewhat frantic and totally inexperienced pilot was ready to attempt the landing.

Emergency vehicles were called out and ready for what seemed like an approaching disaster.

Witnesses said the plane's nose nudged the center line and bounced a few times before the tail hit the ground. The Cessna ended up in a patch of soggy grass next to the runway. Amazingly, Kupferschmid was not injured.

This pilot listened and followed those instructions as if his life depended on it - and it did.

Imagine what would take place in the lives of believers if we listened to and obeyed the Word of God with the same earnestness.

- Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion

What a powerful lesson that should be to us. God is not going to have us crash and burn if we follow Him. He will give to us the victory that we need in the situations that we face.

And one more point here before we move on and I want you to take note of this.

Think about the sin of Achan. If he only waited God was going to bless them but he took the matter into his own hands and he lost everything. You see, in this battle they were going to get the spoils of this victory at Ai. How often we do the same and miss out on the blessings God had for us!

So this first point here is this. ***INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE LORD!*** We must follow them.

We see that God gave Joshua a plan for conquering the city of Ai, and now he must follow it. When we need to regain the victory, we must follow God's plan.

And, as we read on, we will see the second point, ***JOSHUA INSTRUCTS THE PEOPLE.*** Look at Joshua chapter 8 starting in verse 3 as we look at this next point.

VERSES 3-8

Remember that the Lord gave instructions to Joshua in what they were to do in this battle against Ai and now we see Joshua take the Word of God to the people or ***JOSHUA INSTRUCTS THE PEOPLE.***

How does that relate to us today?

I look at this picture here like this. As pastors, as church leaders, as they read God's Word, as they get instructed by the Lord in what to do, they then go and share with the people the message from the Word of God.

And maybe that is a little simplistic, but why does it need to be complicated? It doesn't! You see, am I really smarter than God? Of course not! Is anyone smarter than God? Of Course not!

Then don't you think it would just make sense that we read and hear what God has for us in His Word if He is all knowing and has what we need in life? Of course it makes sense and yet, so often today we see pastors and leaders not bringing the Word of God to the people!

This is a growing trend in churches across America, the moving away from expository preaching or teaching verse by verse through the Bible! We have people's opinions instead of God's Word! We have book studies, not Bible studies, and there is not much to gain from that!

And what happens is we now move to topical studies, which can be okay but if that is the diet you are on, it can be dangerous.

The reason it can be dangerous is because the person teaching can take you where they want you to go and keep you away from the things that they don't want you to hear!

The Bible, the Word of God is a collection of 66 books that have been inspired by God, breathed from God to us and don't you want to hear all that God has for you?

Imagine being in the Army and you get a letter from your wife. And it is ten pages long!

What do you do with it? Do you read the second page, then maybe a part of the ninth page, skip a few pages here and there? Of course you do not do that. You read every single word because, without a doubt, it is going to be a loving letter that will encourage you during your time away from your wife!

That is really what we have here. This is God's Word to us; it is a love story of sinful man and a loving God who was willing to sacrifice His life so that we can live with Him for eternity!

And it is His love letter to us until He returns!

Let me share this with you because it will show you where the church is going. It is from a few years back, but you can clearly see that things have not gotten any better. The Word of God is pushed aside for social issues, for this and for that and yet, it is the Word of God that is living and powerful, not the word of Pastor Joe or anyone else! And we also see the Word of God put down by pastors and leaders and as they are doing that, they are getting the people not to trust what God has said. That is a dangerous place to go! But listen to what one pastor has to say about expository preaching and he has an influence upon millions of Christians!

We are told,

Ed Stetzer, whose employer – *Lifeway “Christian” Resources* – sells more than a few Andy Stanley books, interviewed the Georgia pastor on the topic of preaching related to his book, *Communicating for a change*. . . . What follows is nothing short of a shocking (but refreshingly honest and explicit) rejection of expository preaching, and although is not new, is making its way around social media as of late.

The question posed to Stanley was this . . .

What do you think about preaching verse-by-verse messages through books of the Bible?

Stanley’s answer . . .

Guys that preach verse-by-verse through books of the Bible– that is just cheating. It’s cheating because that would be easy, first of all. That isn’t how you grow people. No one in the Scripture modeled that. There’s not one example of that.

. . . If what Stanley means here is “*That isn’t how you [spiritually] grow people*” then, essentially, we’re left to believe that Stanley’s understanding of growth is that it’s done by the person, the pastor, the “communicator” and not by God through the Scriptures. Notice the phrasing, “That’s not how *you* grow people.”

You’re right, Stanley. That’s not how *we* grow people. It’s how *God* grows people, through his Spirit, via the Holy Scriptures. Stanley continues (from the above) . . .

*No one in the Scripture modeled that. **There’s not one example of that.***

[Let me interject here. First of all, in II Timothy 3:16-17 Paul tells us, “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**”

I think that is pretty clear, all of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation has been given to us by God and we need it to live out our lives in a way that would honor God and would bless us. You want to be complete, know the Word of God!

I know, that does not speak of expository preaching, but listen to what Paul said in Acts 20:26-31 to the Ephesian pastor’s, “**Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.**”

Did you see what Paul did for these men? He gave them the *WHOLE* counsel of God, not just part, not a topical message, but verse by verse he went through the Scriptures. Granted, the Word of God was not in chapters and verses at this time, but you know what I mean. When Paul says the whole counsel of God, that is exactly what he means.

And the warning that Paul gave to Timothy regarding the last days is simple. He tells Timothy what he is to do as a pastor and warns him of what some people want. Listen carefully to what Paul says in II Timothy 4:2-5, **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”**

We have developed a theology of giving people what they want and that is dangerous. We are to give people what they need, and they may not always want it, but that is our responsibility as pastors as leaders!

So we may not see the words expository preaching in the Bible but we do see it played out, the concept is definitely there and why would God preserve His Word all these years if it was not important? He wouldn't but He did because it is that important to us!

And, if you think about it, by degrading the Word of God what we are telling God is that we are smarter than He is and thus, our words are more important than His Words! That is so wrong, and I think you can clearly see why. We are not smarter than God, not even close!]

Stanley and other seeker-friendly “creative” preachers improve upon the Text by incessant story-telling and personal anecdotes. That’s the “engaging” part of his shtick. I’ll remind you, beloved, that Jesus taught in parables not to *reveal* engaging and compelling truths from Scripture, but to *conceal* truth from those who didn’t need it at the time (Matthew 13:11-17).

I’m convinced the non-exegetical approach of modern-day story tellers and dreamers is for the same, but non-divine, purpose – to conceal truth and not to reveal it. Cloak scripture in stories and endless illustrations like riddles, the oracles of God that have now been made clear to us; the choir will get it and the lost won’t see anything offensive and stumble on no Cornerstone. Stanley continues . . .

All Scripture is equally inspired, but not all Scripture is equally applicable or relevant to every stage of life. My challenge is to read culture and to read an audience and ask: What is the felt need? Or perhaps what is more important, what is an unfelt need they need to feel that I can address?

We see here what Stanley is busy reading – and it’s not the Scripture. After all, the Scripture isn’t equally applicable or relevant to every “stage of life” (which is why the typical seeker-friendly church preaches from only a dozen different scripture texts – David and Goliath, Jonah and the whale, Joshua and the Sun, etc – repackaged over and over and over again in an endless sea of regurgitated life advice in a camouflage of changing phraseology).

No, Stanley is reading *culture*. He's reading the *audience*. He's not a preacher – he's contemporary anthropologist. His job is basically the same as Ed Stetzer's – except applied as ecclesiastical methodology instead of as helpful missiological data – Stanley studies culture and provides to the consumer what it is asking for. Stanley's king is not Christ. The consumer, in Stanley's ministry, is king.

Stanley then gives an example for why expository preaching is over-rated and it's the icing, and not the cake, that makes the difference . . .

I believe the true defining moment of my life as a communicator took place when I was in seminary. I was asked to do a chapel for the high school academy at First Baptist Church, Dallas. So I got the message all ready to go, and I was going to preach on the story of Naaman. And God told him to dip in the water seven times and he would be healed. I had all this great stuff. And I was sitting in my one-room efficiency apartment and I was thinking, "These kids have heard everything. They go to church all the time. They are not going to remember this. This is just another chapel. What can I do so that they can remember this? I am just going to come up with one phrase and I am going to say it so many times that they can't possibility forget it."

So I came up with this phrase: "To understand why, submit and apply." That was over 30 years ago and I still remember it. So I told the whole story. And I said the bottom line was: "To understand why, submit and apply." And I said that God is going to ask you to do some things that you might not understand why, but you must submit and apply. I had them say it over and over.

Three years go by, and I am working in the college department in the same church and a freshman walks in and says, "I remember you. To understand why, submit and apply." He didn't remember my name. He wasn't even sure where he had seen me before. But it stuck in his head. And I'll never forget thinking, "That is what I want to do for the rest of my life."

I think the story says it all. It's not a catechism of Scripture that the next generation needs or wants. No, we need to catechize [instruct] ourselves in Stanley and other wordsmiths who take the sharp-as-any-two-edged-sword Word of God that divides souls and spirits, that regenerates hearts and makes us born again through its incorruptible seed and create pithy little, theologically shallow slogans that end up on bumper-stickers and t-shirts and eventually are debunked by discernment blogs for being so doctrinally anemic and usually preposterously and biblically incorrect until even the originators of those slogans grit their teeth in an awkward smile, throw up their hands in a defensive posture and walk backward slowly from their messed up semantic children. *That's* how you grow people.

I want to take all this stuff in the Bible, and I want to say it so simply that it gets so lodged in people's hearts that in the moment of transition or temptation or whatever it might be, they think: What is that statement? What is that phrase?"

Not from the Bible, but from Stanley. Not from the collection of 66 Books of Inspired Writ, but from this book sold at Lifeway. Yes. That's the ticket.

- <http://bit.ly/2v7ALlx>

Joshua did not water down the message. He did not alter the message. Joshua gave to the people the Word of God no matter how easy or difficult it may have been. This is what they needed to hear. Not the words of Joshua, but the Word of God and that is exactly what Joshua gave to them.

We also see that with Jeremiah. This prophet of God had a message of judgment from God. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was going into captivity for their sin, their rebellion against God.

And the people did not receive the message well. They rebelled against Jeremiah, threw him into a pit and-so-on.

Would it have been easier for Jeremiah to water down the message? Of course it would have been but then he would let the fear of man drive him instead of the fear of the Lord guide him! Be careful. Do you want to be driven like cattle or lead by the Lord?

Now, how are the children of Israel going to respond to this message? That is our next point, ***OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD'S INSTRUCTIONS***. Let's pick up our reading in Joshua chapter 8 beginning in verse 9.

VERSES 9-13

First of all, the city of Ai had maybe 12,000 people and maybe half were soldiers, fighting men and now Joshua says to send in 30,000 men.

This first group of soldiers were to be used as an ambush against the city of Ai and they were on the west side, hiding out.

The second group of soldiers, including Joshua camped right in front of the city of Ai, on the north side so they could be seen. They were the decoys you might say to entice the soldiers of Ai to come out of the city after them as they had done previously!

The third group of soldiers, about 5,000 were used to cut off any reinforcements coming to the aid of the people of Ai.

I love the fact that they did not doubt what the Lord told them, but they went forward and obeyed the instructions that the Lord had given to them!

Think about this for a minute. When you find yourself in a mess, in sin, was it because you were obeying the Lord? Of course not and that is always what happens when we disobey the Lord. We get ourselves into trouble and we don't find the victory that we were looking for!

Our obedience to the Lord is so important. Again, think about it. God loves us more than we will ever know. He is all knowing. Thus, when He tells us something it is not just a guess on His part what is best for our lives, it is what is best for our lives and we must obey and walk accordingly!

Let me show you what I mean. We are told,

More than 90 people conducted an all-night search for an eight-year-old boy named Dominic. While on a skiing trip with his father, this little boy apparently had ridden a new lift and skied off the run without realizing it. They hoped to find Dominic somewhere on the snowy mountain slope before it was too late.

As each hour passed, the search party and the boy's family became more and more concerned. By dawn they still had found no trace of him. Two helicopters joined the search, and within fifteen minutes had spotted ski tracks. A ground team followed the tracks which changed to small footprints. The footprints lead to a tree where they found the boy at last.

“He’s in super shape,” the area search and rescue coordinator announced to the anxious family and press. “In fact, he’s in better shape than we are right now.” A hospital spokesman said the boy was in fine condition and was not even admitted.

The rescuer explained why the boy did so well despite spending a night in the freezing elements: His father had enough forethought to warn him what to do if he became lost, and his son had enough trust to do exactly what his father said.

Dominic protected himself from possible frostbite and hypothermia by snuggling up to a tree and covering himself with branches. As a young child, he never would have thought of doing this on his own. He was simply obeying his wise and loving father.

- A Treasury of Bible Illustrations

What a wise young man, obeying the words of his father and it saved his life!

Again, why do we think that God’s instructions to us are going to ruin our fun, make life miserable for us? Because we don’t know Him as a loving Father! You see, you can’t say you know Him as a loving Father if you don’t trust Him.

The general concept of obedience both in the Old Testament and New Testament relates to hearing or hearkening to a higher authority. One of the Greek terms for obedience conveys the idea of positioning oneself under someone by submitting to their authority and command. Another Greek word for obey in the New Testament means “to trust.”

According to *Holman’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* a succinct [concise] definition of biblical obedience is “to hear God’s Word and act accordingly.” *Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary* states, “True ‘hearing,’ or obedience, involves the physical hearing that inspires the hearer, and a belief or trust that in turn motivates the hearer to act in accordance with the speaker’s desires.”

Thus, biblical obedience to God means to hear, trust, submit and surrender to God and His Word.

Let me share a few Scriptures with you regarding obedience to the Lord and His Word.

In Romans 6:16-18 we are told, **“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”**

When we came to saving faith, we came from being in bondage in sin to being set free in Christ. Because of that we need to walk accordingly by surrendering our lives to the Lord, obeying what He has told us in His Word!

In Joshua 1:8 we are told, **“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”**

And in John 14:23-24 Jesus said, **“... ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.’”**

Our love for the Lord is seen in our obedience to His Word! This is not legalism it is love. We do this out of love.

Again, my wife and I have been married now for forty years! Yes, I got married when I was twelve! Okay, maybe just a little older, but not that much!

Now, here's the thing. You can come over and check this out. There are no laws that I have to follow. Julie does not have a list of things that I can and can't do!

I know, you are wondering how we then could be married for forty years! Well, Julie is a saint, but that is not what I am getting at here.

I do those things that will bless my wife, honor my wife, not out of the law but out of ***LOVE!***

Also, I don't do things that would hurt my wife, dishonor my wife, not because there is some law that says that I can't do those things, but out of ***LOVE!***

And here's the thing. If we truly believe that God loves us more than we will ever know. If we truly believe that God has what is best for our lives. Then we will follow Him all the days of our lives. And that leads us to our last point – ***THE VICTORY AGAINST AI!***

VERSES 14-29

Here we see the victory that the children of Israel had against Ai because they obeyed the Lord!

Look at what took place. When the King of Ai saw the children of Israel once again, it was like Deja vu to him. So he decided to do what he did before, go out after the children of Israel and send them running once again. Only this time, as the men of the city left Ai, they also left it open for the children of Israel who were waiting on the west side, to enter in. Ai was now defenseless!

Notice how they gain this victory, the plan that God gave to them.

They were going to trick the men of Ai into battle. An ambush. As the men of Ai saw the children of Israel coming towards the city, they would go out after them, causing the children of Israel to flee, leading the men of Ai away from the city.

Once they left the city, the children of Israel that were waiting on the other side of the city would enter the defenseless city of Ai and destroy it.

The men of Ai would then see the smoke rising from their city and realize they have been tricked, and then Joshua and his men would come after them. The men of Ai knew the battle was over, their hearts melted when they saw their city go up in flames.

And Ai was completely destroyed, not by the power of the children of Israel but by the power of God working in and through the children of Israel as they walked in obedience to the Lord.

And in this victory the children of Israel took the spoils of this battle.

And for the children of Israel, God was teaching them a lesson. There are consequences for obedience and disobedience and God would bless through their obedience to Him and He would chasten in the disobedience!

Our victory is in the Lord and in our obedience to what He is telling us in His Word. That is the lesson we have learned here this morning. God wants to give us the victory, but we must follow Him!

Let me close with this.

Fort Bragg, North Carolina: A likely clerical error sent a supply clerk with the 82nd Airborne Division out the door of an airplane on his first parachute jump without any formal training.

Army Specialist Jeff Lewis, 23, who landed unhurt, said he was just doing what a good soldier is supposed to do when he made the jump: Follow orders. “The Army said I was airborne-qualified,” Lewis said. “I wasn’t going to question it.”

- Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic

May we follow the Lord that way as He instructs us to live out our faith, to walk. May we follow Him all the days of our life and see what He will do in us and through us as we follow Him!