

Hymns: 3 Amazing Grace! 19 The Light of the World Is Jesus

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-11; Psalm 32

Big idea: God Is Our Refuge and Strength

Our scripture text for today is: **Joshua 8:1-35**

Introduction

When you think of a great American inventor, whose name pops into your mind? To many, that would be Thomas Edison. Among his inventions were the electric light bulb, the phonograph, and the movie camera. Who remembers the old phonograph with a horn for an amplifier and a crank to make it play? What about an 8mm movie camera? Edison had many *glowing* successes, but along the way, he had many more failures.

He once said, “I have not failed 10,000 times—I’ve successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work.”

Yet his inventions sparked the formation of such household names as General Electric, RCA, and NBC. The Bible says that in one way every human is a failure. *All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*

Joshua had led the Israelites across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. His mission was to conquer that land and give it as a possession to the Israelites. As we saw last time, Achan sinned by stealing some plunder from the victory at Jericho. The LORD held all of Israel responsible and let them lose their first battle at Ai. Joshua failed miserably to realize why the LORD was judging Israel with that defeat. He didn’t realize that Achan had sinned. He tried to get the LORD’s attention with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes, but the LORD called him out for his useless externalism. But Joshua and all Israel brought Achan to justice and returned to the LORD. This allowed the LORD bless them with a second conquest in the Promised Land.

That’s where we pick up our story today.

Joshua 8:1-2 The LORD reassures Joshua and promises victory.

[fight song at start of Joshua: Be strong and of a good courage]

[1] *And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai:*

That’s the next city in from Jericho.

see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land:

the whole thing, the king, the people, the city, the land – everything.

[2] *And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil*

thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves:

That's just business as usual. When an army defeats its enemy's territory it takes their things as plunder. In Jericho, the rules were different because it was the first conquest and was dedicated to the LORD.

Lay ... an ambush for the city behind it.

Let's get our bearings a bit here. The Israelites started out on the east side of the Jordan River. They set up camp at a place called Shittim. Then they crossed over the Jordan River and set up camp at a place called Gilgal. There they did their circumcision and devotions to the LORD. They got themselves right. This is a religious experience they're doing in the Promised Land. They crossed over into the Promised Land. The first thing they did was they got right with the LORD.

Then they marched around Jericho. The LORD gave them the victory by knocking the walls down. They went in, burned the city, and took only the metals to put into the treasury of the LORD – except for Achan's sin.

They were pretty confident in themselves. They tried to go take Ai. They said they don't have a big army. We'll just take three thousand men. When they went up against the city, and were met by the soldiers of Ai, the Israelites were afraid. The LORD put fear in their hearts. They turned and ran – losing thirty-six soldiers. They were all very discouraged at that point – especially Joshua.

The LORD tried to cheer him up here. He said, "Fear not, neither be thou dismayed." So you can tell Joshua was kind of upset over this thing. He tried to get things right. The old fight song was, "Be strong and of a good courage." Here it's just a little different, "Fear not, neither be dismayed."

But He gave him the battle plan. The battle plan was was you're going to go around the back of the city and ambush it. Here we read what Joshua tells the troops based on what the LORD told him.

Joshua commands his troops.

[3] So Joshua arose, and all the people of war,

That's his soldiers.

to go up against Ai:

Let's get our bearings here. Gilgal was where the Israelites were camped. It was just north of the Dead Sea on the west side of the Jordan River. Ai was about fifteen miles northwest of their camp at Gilgal.

They had conquered Jericho, their home base was Gilgal, To go up against Ai:

Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night.

How big of an army did Joshua have? One-half million crossed over the Jordan River, so thirty thousand is just six percent. But these are the mighty men of valor, the elite troops like the Navy Seals and Army Rangers in our military. He selected the top soldiers and positioned them at the far side of the city. We're going to play an ambush game – which is what the LORD told them.

[4] And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready:

He's telling them to watch. Go back there and watch. He sent them out there at night.

[5] And I, and all the people that are with me,

He's leading the main army.

will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, ...

Remember they already lost the battle when they approached the city. They were met by the soldiers from Ai and were defeated. They fled in fear and actually lost thirty-six Israelite soldiers in that defeat.

[6] (For they will come out after us) till we have drawn them from the city;

So we have two military strategies here:

1. An ambush.
2. A decoy.

The decoy was Joshua with all of his troops approaching the entrance to the city. But they didn't know that thirty thousand elite soldiers were back behind them.

...

[7] Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.

Joshua has his heart and focus right now. It's the LORD who will deliver them the victory. Despite all of this strategy, the LORD will deliver them the city.

[8] And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of the LORD shall ye do. See, I have commanded you.

Those are the soldiers' marching orders from Joshua.

Joshua Leads the Ambush Strategy.

Next, we have the description of what actually happened.

*[9] Joshua therefore sent them forth: ... they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Bethel and Ai, **on the west side of Ai:***

Now Bethel is right next to Ai – just slightly west (vv. 9, 13) maybe a mile or two away – very close. They’re sort of like twin cities

but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

The elite troops sneaked behind Ai at night without being discovered. Joshua remained with his troops in their camp at Gilgal that night.

[10] And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.

Now the big army is approaching. The ambush army is in the back and out of sight.

[11] And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai.

That’s pretty typical. Cities often locate on a hill to make them more defensible and to give them a good view.

*[12] And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush **between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.***

For some reason he added five thousand regular troops to the the thirty thousand elite troops that were already there. Perhaps they brought provisions, water, fire, or weapons. We’re not told.

[13] And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

Joshua is making his decoy visible now.

[14] And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he [did] not [know] ... there were liers in ambush against him behind the city.

He’s looking here, and he’s not looking back there. They’re saying, “We’re going to get them – just like last time. They’re coming this way. We’re going to scare them away.”

[15] *And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were **beaten** before them, and **fled** by the way of the wilderness.*

They went back towards the east.

[16] *And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn ... from the city.*

So now, all of the soldiers of Ai, not just the army charged with fighting the invaders, but all of the defenders inside the city they said, “We’re going – all of us. Let’s go! They’re running.” They took off after them. Unfortunately, they left the city completely undefended.

[17] *And there was not a man left in Ai or Bethel, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel.*

[18] *And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand*

This was the signal to tell the ambush army to attack.

toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city.

[19] *And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand:*

Although the ambush army was hiding, they were still able to see. They were watching for Joshua’s signal – the spear.

and they entered ... the city, and took it, and hastened and set the city on fire.

There was no opposition. They just went in and took it.

[20] *And when the men of Ai looked behind them,*

The men of Ai are saying, “We beat them one time. We chased them. We’re chasing them again. We’re winning. And then all of the sudden, “Wait a minute. Our city is burning up. And who are those hordes of elite soldiers?” It’s sort of like a Wily E. Coyote moment, or maybe a Scooby-Doo moment: Uh Oh! All of the sudden, their fortunes changed

they saw, and, behold, the smoke of the city ascended up to heaven, and they had no power to flee this way or that way:

They were surrounded.

and the people that fled to the wilderness turned back

At that point, they turned around. They were running away from the soldiers of Ai as a decoy. Now, they turning around and running straight at them. They had soldiers behind them. They're trapped. They ended up slaughtering all of the soldiers. Then they went back to the city and slaughtered all of the civilians that lived there.

[25] And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai.

They went back and killed all of the people of Ai. They slaughtered all of the soldiers. This sounds really bloody, gruesome, and perhaps cruel. We need to remember that the LORD had waited four hundred years for the Canaanites to repent and turn to the LORD. They never did.

They were involved in idolatry and gross immorality. This was God's judgment on them, and as a result the Israelites received this second city in the Promised Land. They took Jericho, and now they're getting Ai.

[26] For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

[27] Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of the LORD which he commanded Joshua.

[28] And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.

This day refers to the time when the book of Joshua was written. It turns out, according to archaeologists, Ai was rebuilt one time but it was conquered again and leveled. It's a ruin today. And by the way, the word *Ai* means a heap of ruin.

[29] And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his [carcass] down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise[ed] ... a great heap of stones [there], that remain[s] unto this day.

Again, *this day* refers to the day when the book of Joshua was written. This process is somewhat familiar here. Joshua is actually following the rule given in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 that they are not to leave a dead body on a tree overnight. That's one reason why they were so quick to get Jesus' body into the tomb after he died. Also, Betsy tells me even today some Jews after a death are very quick to get that body into the ground.

We've reached the last section of this chapter we see another memorial.

Joshua 8:30-35 Joshua built a memorial and read the word of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 27:2-8)
[Shechem: Samaritan woman at the well, bones of Joseph]

[30] Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal,

There are two mountains there that are treated as a pair. The valley between them is called Shechem. Shechem is really interesting because that's the place where Jacob's well is and also where Joseph's body was buried there.

And the link here is if you remember John chapter 4 where Jesus met the Samaritan woman. The woman posed to Jesus a difference the Samaritans had with the Jew regarding the place to worship. She asked Jesus why the place of worship is not there at Shechem. This is the place that the LORD prescribed in Deuteronomy for an altar to be built in Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:2-8). That's what Joshua did here.

He followed the instructions given in Deuteronomy to build this altar. It was to be made of rough stones that had not been fashioned by men. They performed offerings, peace offerings, and sacrifices on it according to the requirements given by Moses in Deuteronomy. He wrote all of the Law on the stones of this altar. This likely referred to all of the book of Deuteronomy. We cannot say for sure, but Deuteronomy contains all of the things we are talking about here.

Half of the tribes located on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Ebal:

[34] And ... he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

[35] There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

Basically, he read the Bible to the people.

Application

So after being defeated at Ai, the children of Israel returned to the LORD, and the LORD gave them a second-chance victory. Perhaps you can recall facing defeat and discouragement in your own life. I know I can. You were beside yourself looking for the solution to your problem. We can be assured like with Joshua, when we're walking with the LORD, we're never without recourse. As Psalm 46 celebrates, the LORD is our Refuge and Strength. And as we were told at the beginning of the study of the book of Joshua, the LORD will never leave us nor forsake us. That's of particular comfort – especially when we face difficult times.

You may be wondering whether or not Thomas Edison (the guy with the light bulb) believed in the LORD Jesus Christ. Sadly, he never left a clear testimony regarding his faith. How ironic it would be if the man who brought so much light into the world died without accepting the Light of this world. He may have. Perhaps if he had a close walk with the LORD, his life would have enjoyed a few less failures. For sure, faith in Jesus Christ is the most important event in anyone's life – even in the life of Edison.

Benediction

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:

The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

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