

6. God's will, the perfect way

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God's will is terrible. It is terrible for my flesh. I don't know about you, many times it seems that God was always late for my taste. He didn't drop everything and come to my rescue right away. To make the matter worse, He was at least concerned about my wish list which was a couple miles long. I used to think that what I want should be God's will for me. It seems that God purposely went against my wish and didn't even apologize.

Am I the only one who felt that way? Probably not. You all look saintly, godly and wouldn't do any wrong thing in your lives, but if you are made in flesh and bone, you've thought the same way as I've.

In last chapter, Joshua presumed that it was God's will for them to go after the people of Ai with mere three thousand soldiers from the camp of Israel. They got whipped by the small band of Ai fighters and ran home like little puppies with their tails between their legs. What they didn't know was that they had a sin in the camp just like our flesh that cooperate with satan from within our lives.

Once they dealt with that sin severely, God allowed them to go after Ai again. Yes, Joshua made a mistake by not praying before their attack against Ai and assumed their desires as God's will. We can learn from our mistake. That is one good thing about the past. Even though we can not change a thing, but we can learn from it.

Henry Ford defined a mistake as "an opportunity to begin again, more intelligently." Joshua would also have agreed, because he is about to "begin again, more intelligently" and organize a victory out of his mistakes.

A. A NEW BEGINNING

Joshua 8:1-2 Now the Lord said to 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. 2 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."

Once the nation of Israel had judged the sin that had defiled their camp, God was free to speak to them in mercy and direct them in their conquest of the land. No matter what kind of mistake or sin we may cause, the worst one would be not returning back to God. The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings.

Discouragement over the past and fear of the future are the two typical reactions that often accompany failure. The answer to our discouragement and fear is in hearing and believing God's Word. Even though we don't hear God's audible voice as people often did in Bible times, we have the Word of God before us and the Spirit of God within us. God will direct us if we wait patiently before Him according to His will and His time.

Notice that God says to take all the men of war when they go against Ai. Here Ai represents the flesh. The flesh is the greatest enemy we have, and we need all the resources we have to get the victory against our fleshly desires.

Instead of having their own assumption, this time the children of Israel had a promise from God that He would give the people of Ai to them.

God gave the soldiers the right to claim the spoils, but they were to burn the city. Had Achan waited only a few days, he could have picked up all the wealth that he could lay his hands on. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him. When we run ahead of the Lord, we usually rob ourselves and hurt others.

B. AMBUSH AND ATTACK

Joshua 8:3-13 So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. 4 And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. 5 Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. 6 For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them. 7 Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand. 8 And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the Lord you shall do. See, I have commanded you." 9 Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people. 10 Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai. 12 So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. 13 And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

God gave a new strategy to the Israelites against the Ai people. Our Lord never uses a same method all the time. We humans are the ones who like to keep God in our a and try to figure Him out which we never succeed. Jesus didn't use the same method to heal the sick people.

God performed a mighty miracle at Jericho when He caused the walls to fall down flat, but there was no such miracle at Ai. Joshua and his men simply obeyed God's instructions by setting an ambush and luring the people of Ai out of their city, and the Lord gave them the victory.

It's important that we seek God's will for each challenge so that we don't depend on past victories as we plan for the future. How easy is it for Christian ministries to dig their way into administrative fixes that eventually become graves, simply because the leadership fails to discern whether God wants to do something new for them. When we're through changes as God leads, we become stale and legalistic. Improvements and changes are a part of life.

In the same way, we will sometimes say, "Lord, what is your will? Before I am going to surrender to it, I would like to know what I am getting myself into." But God may tell us something that we don't want to hear. The question is, are we going to do what He says?

It has been said that the condition of an enlightened mind is a surrendered heart. If we want to know the will of God, then we must have a heart that is surrendered. We need to present ourselves to Him, and accept His will, no matter what.

C. THE VICTORY THAT WAS GIVEN BY GOD

Joshua 8:14-29 Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. 15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. 17 There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel. 18 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city. 19 So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. 20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers. 21 Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. 22 Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. 23 But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. 24 And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. 25 So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand--all the people of Ai. 26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. 27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. 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 corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day.

When we do the will of God with willing hearts, there is nothing else for us to desire, because He meets all our needs.

Jeremiah 29:11-12 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

We need to keep in mind that this conquest of Ai was not the "slaughter of innocent people" but the judgment of God on an evil society that had long resisted His grace and truth.

The previous heap of stones that Israel had raised was a memorial to Achan who had caused their defeat at Ai. But this heap of stones at Ai was a memorial of

Israel's victory over the enemy. By obeying the Word of the Lord, they had achieved victory out of sin.

D. A RECOMMITMENT IN THE PROMISED LAND

Joshua 8:30-35 Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, 31 as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. 32 And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. 33 Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. 34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

Some time after the victory at Ai, Joshua led the people to the valley between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim near Shechem. Joshua interrupted the military activities to give Israel the opportunity to renew a commitment to the authority of God as expressed in His law.

In building the altar, Joshua was careful to obey Exodus 20:25 and not apply any tool to the stones picked up in the field. No human work was to be associated with the sacrifice, otherwise sinners think their own works can save them. God asked for a simple stone altar, not one that was designed and decorated by human hands, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

The priests offered burnt offerings to the Lord as a token of the nation's total commitment to Him. The peace offerings, or fellowship offerings, were an expression of gratitude to God for His goodness according to the Book of Leviticus.

In the valley between the two mountains stood the priests and Levites with the ark, surrounded by the elders, officers and judges of the nation. The people were all facing the ark, which represented the presence of the Lord among His people. When Joshua and the Levites read the blessings of the Lord one by one, the tribes at Mt. Gerizim which means the mount of blessing responded with a loud united "Amen!" which in the Hebrew means "So be it!" When they read the curses, the tribes at Mt. Ebal which means the mount of cursing would respond with their "Amen" after each curse was read. This was for everyone to understand and follow the law of God.

We can never exaggerate the importance of the Christian soldier spending time daily in the Word of God. Unless daily we take the sword of the Spirit by faith, we go into the battle unarmed and unprepared. Spiritually minded believers are victorious because they allow the Word of God to "saturate" their minds and hearts. The Spirit using the Word controls their desires and decisions and this is the secret of victory.

How can we ever do the will of God when we neglect the Word of God in our hearts? There is no way. Doing the will of God requires feeding our spirits with His Word daily.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) No matter what kind of mistake or sin we may cause, the worst one would be not returning back to God.

The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings.

2) God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.

When we run ahead of the Lord, we usually rob ourselves and hurt others.

3) To know God's will is a treasure to us. But to do God's will is a privilege for us.

4) Doing the will of God requires feeding our spirits with His Word daily.

Lord, Your will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. In Christ's name, Amen.