FAITH IS THE VICTORY

REGAINING LOST GROUND

Joshua 8:1-8

In the last message we saw what sin can do in the life of a child of God. It:
1. Displeases the Lord
2. Encourages Self-Reliance
3. Forbids our being Strong
4. Engenders Sorrow
5. Advances Slothfulness
6. Troubles our Spiritual Sanity
7. Endangers the Sovereign's Standing
8. Demands Separation
We said that the consequences of sin in our life can be summed up in one word -- DEFEATED!
Unconfessed, unforsaken sin leads to a DEFEATED life. But thank the Lord, we do not have to live in defeat. Victory can be restored to our life by seeking the Lord's forgiveness, and by aggressively attacking and forsaking sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

All of this is illustrated for us in Joshua 7. The Israelites were defeated at Ai because of sin. The Lord spoke to Joshua and told him how to go about discovering where the sin was and how to deal with it. Joshua did what the Lord told him to do and verse 26 of Joshua 7 says, "So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger."

Now, as we come to chapter 8, Joshua and the rest of the children of Israel are faced with the task of regaining the ground they've lost. No doubt all of us, at some time in our Christian life, have been faced with the challenge of regaining lost ground. Because of sin, we've lost our standing with the Lord, our fellowship has been broken, and we were left to try and restore what has been lost.

If this is the case in your life, then first of all, I want you to consider with me the Possibility of Regaining Lost Ground.

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF REGAINING LOST GROUND

A. Regaining lost ground is Difficult
As a matter of fact, regaining lost ground may be the most difficult task that faces any born again child of God. I remember being told years ago as a teenager that a testimony is hard to get, easy to lose, and seldom regained. We can get back what we've lost, but we must address three matters before we will be successful.

1. Fear
a. As the Lord spoke to Joshua in the opening verse of chapter 8 He said, "Fear not." Joshua had expressed some fear in chapter 7 as a result of being defeated, and failure
to face those fears would only mean more defeat.
b. Sin does not bring tranquility to the heart of man. It fills the heart with fear. Being
defeated certainly ought to help us develop a healthy fear or respect for sin and what
it can do, but we should not allow it to keep us from making any further efforts toward
gaining what is rightfully ours in the Lord.

2. Fainting
a. The Lord went on to say to Joshua, "neither be thou dismayed."
b. Fear and fainting go together. The problems over Achan's sin had taken away
Joshua's initiative to go to battle again.
c. Pessimism dominates the thinking of those who become faint. Their minds are filled
with thoughts of "What's the use?"
d. Remember something that we've already mentioned in these messages. FAILURE
IS NOT FALLING DOWN, IT'S NOT GETTING UP!
e. Regarding those who have been defeated by sin, Arthur Pink said this. "When
iniquities have prevailed against him and the enemy has humiliated him, he is prone
to be "swallowed up with over-much sorrow" and suffer Satan to keep him in the
slough of despond, which is not only needless and foolish, but dishonoring to God.
If he has sincerely and contritely forsaken his sins, then he should confidently reckon
upon God's mercy and appropriate His promise "He is faithful and just to forgive
us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". He went on to say that the
Lord "calls upon the restored backslider to renew the contest with his enemies. If
at first you don't succeed, try, try, again. Quit not the fight because you have been
worsted, nor even if you were wounded. Though you were blamable for the failure,
having confessed the same to God, resume the struggle."

3. The Future
a. Fear and fainting causes us to view the future as bleak.
b. The Lord reassured Joshua as to his purpose for the children of Israel when He said, "See, I have given
into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and
his land." There was still hope for the Israelites even though they had failed
miserably. God still had a plan and a purpose for them and that was to conquer the
land.
c. Even though we've effectively removed from our life the sin that had defeated us,
there's still the tendency to think negatively in regards to God ever being with us
again. The devil will do all that he can to try and convince us that God is through with
us and that a life of victory is not to be had.
d. Nothing could be further from the truth. As long as we're still breathing, God has a
purpose for us, and that is to conquer the power of sin in our life and to enter the land
of full blessing.

B. Regaining lost ground is Doable
1. The Lord said, "And thou shalt DO to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her
king;"
2. The Lord never one time suggested that it would be easy, but He did say that it would be
done. And by the same token, getting back what we lost because of sin may not be easy,
but it can be done.

II. THE STRATEGY FOR REGAINING LOST GROUND
The strategy for recovering lost ground is three-fold. It involves:

A. Confronting the Enemy v. 3a
1. The children of Israel knew that they couldn't ignore what happened at Ai. If they were going to continue to gain ground and be successful in their quest for the promised land it would have to involve a victory at Ai.
2. God's plan for us in regaining lost ground includes confronting the sin that caused the defeat. We can't ignore it or pretend that it doesn't exist, nor can we hope to make things better by running from our sin.
3. Like Joshua and the army of Israel we must "go up against" our sin regardless of how fearful or faint we may be. Our spiritual success in the future will depend upon our ability to confront sin in the present.

B. Retreating and Relying Upon the Almighty v. 5, 7b
1. To repeat something that I said early on in this series, if we could change ourselves, we would have already done it. When are we going to learn that? As long as we're relying upon our own ability to overcome sin, we will continue to be miserably defeated.
2. There's a principle in the New Testament which deals with strength through weakness. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul said, "...for when I am weak, then am I strong." In other words, when Paul was at his weakest, God was at His strongest.
3. The more we are willing to retreat and to rely upon God's strength, the more victorious we will be. He's just waiting for us to start following His strategy for victory.
4. Let me quickly point something out here so there will not be any mistakes. To quote Mr. Pink once again, "God's gracious assurances unto His people are not designed to promote indolence, but instead to stimulate and to encourage diligence." In other words, when the Lord tells us that the victory is ours, that does not mean that we are not to put forth any effort in the battle. It simply means that what effort we do put forth, is to be put forth in the energy of the Spirit and not the flesh. The fact that the Lord said that we could overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil should be incentive enough for us to surrender ourselves fully to Him in order to have His best for us.

C. Burying the Memory vs. 8, 28-29
1. Once God gave them the victory and helped them recover the ground that was lost, Israel got on with their lives. The events that took place at Ai became nothing more than pages in the history book. Ai was a learning experience.
2. Someone once said, "The past is valuable if used as a guidepost, but dangerous if used as a hitching post."
3. The importance of learning from our mistakes and going on cannot be overstated.
4. Remember what took place in chapter 5? The act of circumcision was renewed and the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. Joshua 5:3 says, "And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins." The "hill of the foreskins" was where all of that which had been cut away was buried. The point that I want to reiterate is that the Israelites did not ever go back and uncover that old, dead skin. It was gone! It was buried! And we need to do the same with our past failures.

III. THE REMEDY FOR LOSING GROUND AGAIN
While it's good to know that we can regain lost ground, it's even better when we don't lose any in the first place.

ILLUSTRATION: In many tournaments that I have participated in, it is possible to win the championship even if you've been defeated once. It simply means that you have to come up through the loser's bracket and that means that you will be playing a lot more games than anyone else. It's not impossible to win it all, but it is extremely difficult. It works out a whole lot better if you just win every time.
A good number of God's people seldom make it past Ai. They find themselves going back and forth from Jericho to Ai. That is, they live a victorious, triumphant life for awhile and then for one reason or another they have an Ai experience and they're defeated. And they just go back and forth from victory to defeat.

When there is so much more ground to be gained and so many more blessing to be had, it's a shame that so many of God's people never get past Ai. If you want to break out of the vicious cycle that has you going from Jericho to Ai and back to Jericho and back to Ai, then take note of God's remedy set forth in the 8th chapter of Joshua.

**A. Totally Committed**

1. A major part of Israel's defeat at Ai can be attributed to their failure to go "all out" for God. Look again at Joshua 7:3.
2. They were convinced that they could have victory without going "all out." They soon found out that it doesn't work that way.
3. Now look at Joshua 8:1a & 3.
4. See the difference? Joshua went from using just 3,000 men to using all the people of war, and the end result was victory.
5. We've got to be willing to go "all out" for God if we hope to ever get past Ai and into bigger and better things for God.
6. What does it mean to go "all out" for God? Let me illustrate it like this:

**ILLUSTRATION:** In Scotland, around A.D. 1420, "golfe" had become so popular that King James II feared that the pastime placed the country at risk in its ongoing war with England. He reasoned that his men were spending too much time chasing the "golfe" ball and too little time practicing archery. The Scottish archers would pose little threat to their English foes. (Apparently King James II considered a well-placed club head no match for a well-aimed arrow!) The king persuaded his government to pass an act of parliament banning "golfe."

As Christians, our interests must be subservient to our King. Anything that jeopardizes our service for the King of kings must be identified and treated as a lower priority.

7. To go "all out" for God is to put the Lord's work above everything else in our life. That's a commitment that very few who call themselves "Christians" are willing to make. But it's a commitment that must be made if we hope to receive God's blessings to a greater degree in our life.

**B. Extremely Cautious**

1. Notice what Joshua said in the last part of verse 4, and the first part of verse 6. He said, "go not very far from the city, BUT BE YE READY: for THEY WILL come out after us."
2. As we will see in a future message, the moment you begin to advance past Ai in your Christian experience, you better be ready because Satan WILL come after you.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Joe Lewis was the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. He fought 71 times professionally, and he only lost once. During the decade and a half that he held his title, he defended it 25 times. Bill Stern, the voice of American sports on radio, decided toward the end Lewis' career that he would interview him and find out the technique or the secret that Lewis employed in fighting his opponents and how he could win over people who were at times much larger than he. His answer was very simple "I study my opponent, I plan my fight very carefully. The results are always the same. 1) I'm never surprised and 2) I stay on the offensive."
That's pretty good counsel for dealing with the devil. Satan wins many of his victories because he surprises us. We should always be ready and then we'll never be surprised.

3. Remember what Peter said in 1 Peter 5:8? "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:" Successful Christians are "vigilant" when it comes to the devil and his attacks.

C. Strategically Clever
1. Verses 5-6
2. Note the phrase "as at the first", it occurs twice in these two verses. Joshua could predict Ai's reaction because of Ai's conduct in the first battle. Consequently, Joshua was able to use this knowledge to defeat his enemy.
3. Speaking of Satan, the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:11, "we are not ignorant of his devices."

**ILLUSTRATION:** In 1896, a boxer by the name of Norman "Kid" McCoy, who was the welterweight champion of the world, was boxing another fighter who was deaf. Once McCoy discovered that his opponent couldn't hear he took advantage of it. Near the end of the third round McCoy stepped back and motioned to the other boxer's corner like the bell had rung. His opponent nodded his head and dropped his gloves and the moment he did, McCoy knocked him out.

I don't know if the two ever met again, but I'm sure if they did, the challenger didn't fall for the same trick twice.

4. Those who spend their time going from Jericho to Ai and back to Jericho and back to Ai are those who never catch on to what Satan is doing to them. You would think at some point that they would learn from their past mistakes and begin turning defeat into victory.
5. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and when we know beforehand from which direction the devil is mostly likely to attack, we are without excuse when it comes to being defeated.
6. I like what Arthur Pink said about being strategically clever. He said, "Great care needs to be taken and honesty exercised upon this point, for while on the one hand the Word makes it very plain that Satan tempts and assaults the saints, on the other hand we are all too prone to father upon him our own sinful brats...the Devil can gain no advantage over us without our own consent, and therefore whenever we yield to his seductions the fault and guilt are ours, and instead of blaming Satan we must unsparingly condemn ourselves and confess the same to God."
7. One of the most clear and most easily understood Scriptures in the Bible is Romans 13:14.
8. If you know what your weakness is, then guard against it. To be defeated over and over again with the same thing is inexcusable.

If you hope to avoid losing ground again, you must be Totally Committed, Extremely Cautious, Strategically Clever, and most of all you must be Spiritually Consecrated.

**D. Spiritually Consecrated vs. 30-35**

**ILLUSTRATION:** A columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle once wrote: "Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you'd better be running."

Spurgeon wrote likewise: "If you are not seeking the Lord, the Devil is seeking you. If you are not seeking the Lord, judgment is at your heels."
Joshua and the rest of the children of Israel got busy seeking the Lord. They did three things that you and I must be willing to do if we are to keep from losing ground. We must:

1. **Revisit the altar**  
a. If you want to keep from losing ground you'd better get back to the altar.  
b. I'm not talking so much about a public altar as I am a private altar. I don't want to diminish the importance of the public altar. I think that it's important that we come to the altar during the invitation while the Spirit is convicting and our hearts are soft. But we also need a private altar that we can use every day to stay in contact with the Lord.  
c. Notice what Joshua did at the altar in v. 31b. He sacrificed. To prevent losing ground from day to day, we must be willing to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice unto God on a daily basis.  
d. If you find yourself losing ground, then get back to the altar.

2. **Reacquaint ourselves with the Scriptures**  
a. We find Joshua and the children of Israel doing this in verses 32 & 34.  
b. Listen to the words of David in Psalm 119. In verse 25 he said, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word." In verse 28 he said, "My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word."  
c. Life and strength are in the Word of God. Learn to read it! Learn to meditate upon it! Learn to use it as a weapon. Paul called the Word the "sword of the Spirit."  
d. They say that the best way to teach is by repetition. Well if that's the case, I hope some will eventually learn that there is no victory apart from the Word of God. If your time in the Word is "hit and miss", you're times of victorious Christian living will be "hit and miss." And rest assured, it will be more MISS than hit!

3. **Renew our fellowship with the Lord**  
a. In verse 33 we read that the children of Israel "stood on this side the ark and on that side." In other words, the Ark of the Covenant was in the middle, signifying the fact that the Lord was back in the center of their lives.  
b. We need God's presence in our life if we hope to keep from losing ground.  
c. That presence is realized as we spend time in prayer, and time in the Word.

**CLOSING**: I want you to notice where all of this took place. It was in the valley of Shechem. On one side was Mount Gerizim and on the other was Mount Ebal. According to Deuteronomy 27, upon Mount Gerizim were pronounced the blessing, the joy and the glory that were to follow obedience and surrender to the Lord. On Mount Ebal the curse of disobedience was pronounced. 

What I want you to see is this. It was time for the tribes of Israel to make a choice. Follow God and be blessed or refuse to follow God and be cursed. There was no neutral ground.

All of us have stood at this point more than once in our life. Every time we lose ground, we are faced with the decision of what to do. Do we give up, saying "It's not worth it." Or do we get back to the altar, back to the book and back into the presence of God?

What's your choice?