



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Battle for Grace

August 8, 2021

Joshua 8:1-9, 29

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We started the book of Joshua in May and now we have gotten to Joshua Chapter 8. We have seen some ups and downs. We saw God bring Israel to the Jordan. He miraculously split the Jordan and they passed through it. God reestablished the covenant with His people and then sent them into Jericho where they had a wonderful victory. But something happened there. A man named Achan took things that God told them not to take.

Chapter 7 is a dark, dark chapter. This is where you see Joshua, the great leader, falling down with his face in the dirt, weeping. He is confused as to what God is doing. Chapter 7 ends with sin being punished and that's where I want to pick up. Let's start in Chapter 7:26.

And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

Now Chapter 8. **8** *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. 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. 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."³ 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. 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. 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. 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. ⁷ Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand. 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.” ⁹ 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.

Now the rest of the story is the battle plan, but let’s move down to verse 29. ²⁹ *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.*

Now these Bible readings started with judgment. This story ends in judgment – a great heap of stones. And all in between that is what we are going to look at. What is God teaching us in the middle of these two pictures of judgment?

(Pastor prays)

This morning we sang over and over again about God’s forgiveness. We are people who believe in forgiving. But what happens after forgiveness? What happens when you have wronged someone you love and hurt them terribly? You were in the wrong. You go to that person, you ask for forgiveness, and forgiveness is given. This is what Christians do. What happens after? What does forgiveness actually *do*? How do you understand sin and what sin brings? What do you think about judgment? What happens when you are convicted of sin and you repent of sin? Where does the punishment go? What about *after*? This story is about a second chance. It’s a picture of redemption. This is about the good grace of God and what it does. Because believe it or not...

You Live in Grace or You Don’t Live At All

So this morning I want you to dial in and find out, are you a person living in grace? Let’s go to this passage. I believe we will find grace in this passage.

Grace restores hope

Let's go back and talk about the failure in Chapter 7. You remember the man named Achan. He stole in Jericho and after that, Joshua, not knowing that happened, sent the army to fight Ai. Ai defeated them terribly and Joshua could not understand it. Joshua and all the elders fell on their faces before the ark of God. Joshua laments, "Why have you done this? We should have just stayed over on the other side of the Jordan." He is under the judgment of God.

So I've tried to set it up here. Those two piles of rocks are shadows, bookends. As Christians, we read the Bible with the understanding that, in the book, you will find, sometimes lightly and very darkly, sometimes easy to see and sometimes just faint hints, you'll find the footsteps of Jesus. So you see God's judgment fell on Achan in verse 26 but after that you see the wrath of God turned.

Go with me to Joshua 8:29; there you will find a pile of stones on the king of Ai, and there the curse was taken away. Let's first talk about this shadow, like a piece of paper with a watermark. It's hard to read but you know it's there. When I see in Joshua 7:26 that anger of God being taken away, two words come to mind. One word is "propitiation." That's the turning of wrath away. One of the things we are reminded of about the cross of Jesus, when Jesus died on the cross, He took the wrath, and turned it away from any sinner who will believe.

Another word that comes to mind is "expiation," that is, the taking away of the stain of sin on my life. When Achan was judged, the wrath of God was taken away and hope now has returned. In Chapter 8 the king of Ai is hanged on a tree. We learn in Deuteronomy 21 that cursed is anyone hanged on a tree. We are told in Joshua 8:29 that he hung on that tree until evening, and we are reminded that no one is to be hanged on a tree past dark. We remember that when Jesus and the two thieves were hanged on the cross and they weren't dying fast enough, the sun was going down, so Pilate told the soldiers to break their legs to hasten their deaths. They got to Jesus and He was already dead.

Cursed is anyone hanged on a tree. When I read that in 8:29 and 7:26 of Joshua, all I saw were the watermarks, the reminders that my life should have been treated like Achan. I've sinned worse than Achan. My life should have been cursed like the king of Ai. But instead, Jesus turned the wrath of God from me by His death on the cross. Instead, Jesus became cursed. Isn't that what Paul said in Galatians 3:13 when he said, *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by*

becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—
Listen, it is good and right to talk about the Gospel but I want people to tell *me* the Gospel .

What is the Gospel ? Let’s say it explicitly. The Gospel is that God is the holy creator who created every person in here. You are created in the image of God. That’s why you have dignity, that’s why we respect you. But that image of God in you has been disfigured by sin, sin that is so bad that it deserves the wrath or punishment of God. The wrath of God is to be poured out on any sinner and that’s a problem. That’s a problem, but our good God in His initiative saves us from wrath. God in his initiative gives us Jesus, fully God and fully man. He lived perfectly and goes to the cross and there takes the wrath of God. There’s the Gospel. God raised Him from the dead and here’s how the Gospel can become yours. You believe. Turn from your sin and say, “I believe God did that for me at the cross.” And when that happens, we come out of Chapter 7 and, in Chapter 8, grace restores hope. I want you to be a person who lives in hope.

Let me give you something else about grace.

Grace works immediately

Let me show you what I mean. Now we know that the Bible didn’t originally have chapters and verses. Those were put in there as references for me and you for our convenience. They are only there to help us find passages in the Bible. So if we take them away, the Bible is written like a story. Let me read it as it should flow. Chapter 7 is dark. Chapter 8 is hope.

Let me read from Joshua 7:26 – 8:1. ²⁶ *And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor. 8 And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear and do not be dismayed. 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.*

You understand that right after the judgment of God is dropped on Achan, the wrath of God is turned aside, and now God turns to Joshua and says, “Okay.” It even feels like it is happening the same day. What a kindness of the Lord that, once sin is gone, He brings encouragement and gives second chances to His people. What a kindness that God has done in your life that He saved you and forgave you, and you sinned again and He forgives you. What a beautiful

kindness. And what a wonderful thing that grace happens immediately. There is no cooling off period and no probation. Grace acts immediately. You sin after you have become a Christian, you confess to the Lord and ask forgiveness. That grace comes immediately. There is no waiting for God's forgiveness. You know the phrase, "Go and sin no more." It's in John Chapter 5 when Jesus heals the invalid and there is some confusion there. Or the story in John Chapter 8 when a woman is caught in the very act. You read that story. The woman is dragged right there to the feet of Jesus and Jesus writes on the ground and the stones that they were going to throw at her were dropped, and one by one they walk away. When Jesus asks her where her accusers are and she tells him "They are no more." Then immediately Jesus says to her, "Then neither do I accuse you. Go and sin no more."

Go with me to the cross and you see the thieves there and one of them is hurling insults. The other realizes that he deserves to die. And just a faint faith statement, "remember me." And Jesus says, "today." You see, grace is immediate. So if that is true, why are you holding onto guilt that God isn't holding onto anymore? Do you believe in the blood of Jesus that saves you and forgives you? Do you trust that? Maybe you have been sinned against in a terrible way. I would just say to you that if grace has been given to you immediately, why would you hold onto bitterness? Why would you carry around the anger? If grace is true and immediate, we take this grace and press it into our hearts.

Grace is immediate, but let me show you something else.

Grace establishes courage

Go with me to verse 1. They had every reason to fear but the text shows us that the Lord says, "Do Not Fear." So right after everything has gone so terribly wrong, God says, do not be afraid. 39 times in the Old Testament God says it to His people. He said it to Abraham and Moses. He said it to Joshua, Gideon and Solomon. He said it to the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

In the gospels, Jesus says this very thing, "Do not be afraid," to his disciples. God says to Paul when he is on his missionary journeys, "do not be afraid." Flip to the back of the Bible and in the book of Revelation and the exalted Jesus says to the people who are getting ready to be martyred and persecuted, "do not be afraid."

You see, the more you fear God, the less you fear everything else. The more you stand in awe of God and the more your heart realizes who God is, the more you understand your relationship to Him and what grace is, the more you think on God, the more you stand in fear of God, the less everything else seems so fearful.

The last 18 months for preachers has been a tough time because most of us have been in some sort of decision fatigue. You make a decision and you know it's not the right one in some capacity. You can make a decision and know that one-half of the congregation is going to be mad at you. One-half is a lot of people. I have had in the *same day* one person say to me, "why are so many people wearing masks" and the same day someone else says, "you are not doing enough to get people to wear masks in the church." I don't know what I'm supposed to do here. Thankfully that doesn't happen a whole lot but there is this decision fatigue.

Or there is this fear of government overreach; that the government is reaching too far into our church and state and even into our homes. Or this new Delta COVID that's out there now. What do you do about the vaccine or who should wear a mask or overlay that with what's going on with LGBTQ and the culture that is coming down and our future of sending our kids off to school. And if you are not careful, you can be overwhelmed with everything that is going on and pretty soon you can start fearing that more than you fear God.

What are you fearing more than you fear God? As a brother in Christ I am here to tell you that the grace that saved you is the grace that will sustain you and the grace that will strengthen you. Grace establishes courage. Do not be afraid.

Now here's a fourth thing.

Grace strengthens joy

What a wonderful phrase. What a kind thing for God to say to Joshua after such a terrible incident. You see what He says? "Do not fear and do not be dismayed." The word "dismayed" means "do not be shattered, broken or discouraged." It's the idea of being downcast. It's where Joshua was when he was down in front of the ark weeping. God says do not be afraid and do not be discouraged.

You understand that one of the greatest tools that Satan uses against God's people is discouragement. It is hard to encourage yourself, but I would like to point you back to God's grace. The more you consider God's grace, the more you think about God's love, the more you contemplate God's forgiveness, this is the reason we preach doctrine; because if you get the *doctrine* right it leads to *devotion*.

When you think deeply about being regenerated, born again, when you think about what God had to do to make you *be* born again, when you think about the word "justification," the instantaneous removal of your sin, and you being right before God, the penalty being taken away, when you think about justification, you will be encouraged. When you think about sanctification, what God is doing in your life to make you more and more like Jesus, the hard things and the easy things, and when you are whittling away all the junk, when you think about glorification, what it means to leave this world to be with Christ and to be in a world without sin, when you think deeply about providence, it will encourage your heart. When you think about a smiling providence when things are going well or a hard providence when things are going poorly, when you think about stuff like imputed righteousness, what does that even mean? That God, when you are saved puts His righteousness on you so that when He looks at *you*, what He sees is the goodness of Jesus.

If you have a discouraged heart, you need to think about grace. Think about the goodness of God in grace. Think about God being so kind to His people. Grace then will strengthen your joy.

Let me give you a fifth thing to consider.

Grace develops trust

Let's see what the text says in verse 1. **8** *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. 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.*

Do you see the tense? "I have given." Past tense. It is already done. Here you have God as so sovereign that He has gone into the future so that the present looks past-tense to God. Think about that a little bit. How does God's sovereignty work? It means that you can trust what God is doing in your life.

Let me illustrate it by the two plans here. Go with me to the story of Jericho. Isn't it great to go to Jericho, walk around the city a few times then blow a trumpet and the walls fall down? That was God's plan and it was wonderful. We didn't even have to do anything. Sometimes God's plan is like that. Sometimes God's plan is like Ai. It's a detailed battle plan that the intricacies need to be worked out. Sometimes the plan is like Jericho, and sometimes the plan is like Ai. Sometimes the plan is hard and sometimes it is easy, but *every* time, it is *God* doing it. Sometimes you can see it and it's easy, sometimes it's easy and it is *always* God. Sometimes God is teaching you holiness, sometimes He is teaching you humility. Sometimes God is teaching you to wait. And we forget this, but you know The Lord's Prayer: Give us *this day* our *daily* bread. We have gotten so used to having it there that we forget to even ask. Sometimes God has broken into your life so that you will be reminded that you *need* Him. And what He is doing there is developing grace. He's showing you that the ground beneath your feet isn't going anywhere. Whether you are walking into Jericho or you are walking into Ai, you can trust that this is God's plan.

Grace develops trust.

Grace teaches patience

This is the sixth point. Do you see the irony in verse 2? You remember the sin of Achan but look what God is giving His people. 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."*

In Jericho, God says "leave every bit of that alone," but Achan took it. And now, everything that Achan stole, God is saying, "it's yours." If only Achan had waited. Sin is an impatient master. Be careful living in the world of "now." Living in the world of now almost always means compromise. Here we are reminded that God gives His people good things. In His time.

Let's look at point number 7.

Grace overcomes shame

Let's not live in a culture of shame. Grace takes that away. We don't live in that world. We don't air each other's dirty laundry so that we can hold some sort of shame over someone else.

You see what God does here. He takes them right back to the point of their failure. Think about how bad Chapter 7 was with their defeat in Ai and then read Joshua 8:5-7. 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.* 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.* ⁷ *Then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will give it into your hand.*

Do you see what God is doing? God is taking what was a terrible and humiliating defeat and He is redeeming it. God now has given it into their hands. Do you realize that the very arena of your worst defeat and worst sin becomes the absolute gold-medal podium for your new victory in Jesus Christ? You can look back on some grave sin and say, "that's where God's grace shined the brightest." Grace overcomes shame.

Let me give you one more thing.

Grace centers our confidence

When you are a person of grace and you believe in the grace of God given to you through Jesus, you become a confident person in the good grace of God.

Go with me to verse 9 and notice the location. ⁹ *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.*

Now look at Bethel and Ai. Those places sounded so familiar to me. So as I researched I found that, when God called Abraham in Genesis 12 and He would establish His own separate people to show His grace, God called Abraham out from his family into "a place and a people I will show you." He will wander. As you read Genesis 12:1-8, when he finally stopped walking, he landed in between Bethel and Ai. God made a promise to him there, and Abraham made an altar and worshipped there. And now God in His kindness has brought His people to the very spot where, hundreds of years before, God had said, "I will give this to you." He is reminding them that they are *literally* standing on ground that tells them that God's forgiveness and His grace is certain. Brothers and sisters, you live in grace or you don't really live at all.

This morning I want you to bow your heads for just a moment and I'm going to ask you a couple of questions that I want you to answer in your heart.

What is it that keeps you from living in Grace? You believe *something* because you are here at church.

Do you believe that God exists?

Do you believe that you are not perfect and that you are a sinner?

Do you believe that Jesus lived a perfect life and died in the place of sinners?

Do you believe that you are a sinner he died for?

If so, I want you to come down after the service and talk to one of the pastors here.

If you are a believer already: **Do you love the direction of your life more than the forgiveness of God?**

Will you today receive the free grace of God in Jesus?

Because you see, you live in grace or you don't really live at all.

(Pastor prays)