

“QUESTIONS GOD ASKS”

4. “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?”

READING: *Joshua chapter 7 verses 1 - 15*

INTRODUCTION

Mothers have a knack at knowing the answer even before they have asked the question. Amongst my mother's plethora of saying was one which would inflict fear – “Be sure your sins will find you out.” It was on hearing these words addressed to me, that I knew, she knew the answer before she had asked the question.

MAIN BODY

Joshua had, on the death of Moses, succeeded to being leader of the Israelites who had been delivered from slavery in Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, wandered around the desert for 40 years, had crossed the river Jordan into the promised land and were now beginning to occupy the land having just won a great victory taking the city of Jericho. Joshua had been one of those two spies who had spied out the land and was confident that, with God's help, they could take the land. Joshua's faith and trust in God was at an all time high, but as we read in these verses in **chapter 7**, all that confidence was to come crashing down with an unexpected defeat against the relatively easy target of the city of Ai. Now the triumphant Israelites were not feeling so triumphant and the trembling Canaanites were not trembling any more – maybe these invaders were not so invincible after all. From **verses 6 – 9** we find the once buoyant Joshua now in a heap on the ground, having ripped his clothes in despair and covering his head in dirt, wondering what had happened. He accused God of having brought them to Canaan only to hand them over to the enemy. He doubted as to whether they should have crossed the Jordan at all. Last of all, he then told God that His reputation, as the God of the Israelites would now be disgraced and shamed. So, what was God's reaction to all this – “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?” He then went on to outline why what happened, did happen – wilful disobedience to what Joshua had commanded in that all the valuables were to be dedicated to the Lord (**Joshua chapter 6 verses 17 – 19**). However, one of the Israelites, Achan, thought that he knew best – no one would miss a fine coat, some silver coins and a gold bar. A deception that was to cost dearly.

In **chapter 5 verse 14**, we find Joshua on his face again, but for a very different reason. On that occasion he was in awe reverence because God had sent one of His messengers to announce to Joshua the forthcoming victory of the great walled city of Jericho. Now Joshua was on his face for a very different reason, one of hopeless despair. He believed the worst-case scenario would happen because of this one defeat. What happened to the godly confidence? What happened to, 'just trust the Lord'?

But before we rip Joshua to pieces, are we not as guilty of such actions? We display godly confidence in one situation and all goes well for us. But we may expect it to always go well for us. So when it doesn't, we are confused and we start letting our emotions get the better of us. A lot of sports men and women revel in their moments of victory, but when defeat comes, some find it hard to handle. Joshua didn't know what happened to cause this. Sometimes when God doesn't grant us success we're confused because we think we've done everything right. But perhaps there was something that got overlooked. Perhaps there were other factors that we weren't aware of. Not that this was a minor situation. But Joshua went to from the extreme of glorious victory at Jericho to utter despair in the defeat at Ai. Sometimes we can go to extremes when we lose battles too. We might lash out at God and say things like, "Do you want me to fail? Is this your plan?" We conclude the defeat means all hope is lost and we're doomed. But that's typically not the case. When we decide to stand up, brush ourselves off and look at what happened and why, we can get back in the game and find success again.

After Joshua's little tirade we see God telling him to stand up and get off his face – but not in the way that this term is used today. God was telling Joshua to stop praying and start doing. There is a time for praying, but there is also a time for action. God was not angry with Joshua but he wasn't going to allow this defeatist behaviour to continue. There was a problem. It was not with Joshua, but the problem needed to be dealt with. In essence, God was telling Joshua not to give up, but rather to get. God can be like that with us too. He is loving and patient but bemoan our lot for too long, He may speak strongly to us to get our attention to get us moving. It has been said "never underestimate the amount of damage one person can do outside the will of God." For the Israelites, Achan's desire to have something which he did not even get to enjoy, cost them dearly.

Once God had Joshua's attention God told him what had happened and what needed to be done. Reading on through the rest of **Joshua chapter 7**, you'll read how Joshua took care of the problem, and also the dire consequences Achan's actions had on his family. Although Joshua displayed great faith at times, there were others when he didn't. Joshua was courageous and faithful, it's just that in this instance, fear had gripped him. Just like us. We can have times where our faith gets us through one problem, then something else happens and we start to doubt. We can be faithful and courageous as Christians but still have times when we're afraid and thinking worst case scenario. Does that mean we're double minded? No, it means we're human. However, God may do the same thing to us and give us a kick in the behind to get us back on track. God will minister to us in our panic and despair and show us what we need to do. When you see what God wants you to see, you can do what God wants you to do.

Achan had taken the forbidden wealth but pretended that he had obeyed God's command. Achan had been foolish thinking he could sin against God and get away with it. Previously, Israel had done something similar, and as a result couldn't face any of her enemies until their sin had been addressed. The Israelites could never claim their new inheritance so long as one man clung to his forbidden treasures. Everything God had done for His people up to this point mattered not one jot, as long as they couldn't go forward in victory. What a lesson for us as church today!

CONCLUSION

"Be sure your sin will find you out." We all fail at some stage and sometimes there are consequences for our actions. Thankfully, God, in His great mercy shows us grace and offers us the opportunity to confess our sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But God, in His mercy, does not long for us to wallow in self pity for our wrong-doings and says to us "stand up, get your face out of the dirt, move on". Failing is not the worst thing we can do, but allowing our failures to defeat us, is.

A man bought a white mouse to use as food for his pet snake. He dropped the unsuspecting mouse into the snake's glass cage, where the snake was sleeping in a bed of sawdust. The tiny mouse had a serious problem on his hands. At any moment he could be swallowed alive. Obviously, the mouse needed to come up with a brilliant plan. What did the terrified creature do? He quickly set to work covering the snake with sawdust chips until it was completely buried. With that, the mouse apparently thought he had solved his problem. The solution, however, came from outside. The man took pity on the silly little mouse and removed him from the cage.

No matter how hard we try to cover or deny our sinful nature, it's fool's work. Sin will eventually awake from sleep and shake off its cover. Were it not for the saving grace of the Master's hand, sin would eat us alive.

PSALM 133

¹ How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore.

JOSHUA chapter 7 verses 1 - 15

But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

² Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, 'Go up and spy out the region.' So the men went up and spied out Ai.

³ When they returned to Joshua, they said, 'Not all the army will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there.' ⁴ So about three thousand went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, ⁵ who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted in fear and became like water.

⁶ Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. ⁷ And Joshua said, 'Alas, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! ⁸ Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? ⁹ The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?'

¹⁰ The LORD said to Joshua, 'Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? ¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. ¹² That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you any more unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

¹³ 'Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, "Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: there are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.

¹⁴ "In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD chooses shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD chooses shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD chooses shall come forward man by man. ¹⁵ Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done an outrageous thing in Israel!"

YOUR GRACE STILL AMAZES ME

By Phillips Craig and Dean

My faithful Father, enduring friend
Your tender mercy's like a river with no end
It overwhelms me, covers my sin
Each time I come into your presence I stand in wonder once again

*Your grace still amazes me
Your love is still a mystery
Each day I fall on my knees
'Cause Your grace still amazes me
Your grace still amazes me*

Oh patient Saviour, You make me whole
You are the author and the healer of my soul
What can I give You, Lord what can I say
I know there's no way to repay You only to offer You my praise

*Your grace still amazes me
Your love is still a mystery
Each day I fall on my knees
'Cause Your grace still amazes me
Your grace still amazes me*

It's deeper, it's wider, it's stronger, it's higher
It's deeper, it's wider, it's stronger, it's higher
Than anything my eyes can see

*Your grace still amazes me
Your love is still a mystery
Each day I fall on my knees
'Cause your grace still amazes me
Your grace still amazes me*