

HARRINGAY UNITED CHURCH-BAPTIST
SUNDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 2010.

Text: Joshua 8:1-29

Topic: Repentance brings restoration –Do it quick or turn your Defeat into Victory

Introduction:

A Christian life is full of ups and downs, victories and defeats, feeling elated and down. It does not matter how clever or strong you are life will never be in a straight line or on a plane. The graphs keep going up and down.

God allows some of these to happen to train and build us up to maturity. Rom 5:3-5 "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." And James says in 1:3-4 "For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Many times we are the cause of these defeats we have in our lives because of the choices we make every time. James puts it right in 4:1-3 "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." NKJV

Ugo did well last Sunday by pointing us to the effect of the sin of one person and the consequence on the whole nation. Sin is like yeast in the dough, small but affects the whole. It is also like pain in one part of the body, then whole body is affected. Therefore we must avoid sin in our private lives so that the body will not be affected.

Today's text is Joshua 8:1-29 and I want you to learn four things from today's text.

1. God is gracious – He forgives sins

After Joshua and the people of Israel have dealt with the sin among them, they have cleansed the camp, God forgave them and he now commands them to go and re-attack Ai. If you were one of the soldiers, how would you feel? The enemies that have defeated you once and killed some people within the squad, you are likely to be fearful as it is often said 'once beaten, twice shy'. Although it was not recorded that they were fearful but the encouragements God gave Joshua in verse one suggest that they were disappointed and dejected hence, god says to

Joshua 8:1 "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'. NKJV

Our warfare may not be physical today but constantly we are at war with the Devil and his agents and sometimes we fail to win and many times we win by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Our attitudes at those times are most important for next battle we will face. If we refused to see our mistakes in our loss or defeat we would not be able to face the next battle with confidence and assurance of victory. If our defeat comes through our disobedience, all what we need to do is to deal with that sin, repent of it and ask God to forgive us and because He is gracious and just He will forgive and lead us into new ways of life that will lead to next victory.

Now that God has forgiven his people He will ensure their victory and will give new instruction on how to do things.

2. God is all knowing – He is a strategist

1 Corinthians 1:25 "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men". NKJV. He who knows all things and controls everything is in charge. He is the captain of the Army of God under whose command Joshua was a sub-commander. He gives a different strategy to Joshua which is completely different from that of Jericho. Contrary to advice of Joshua' spies, God tells Joshua to take the entire army and divide them into two groups and lay ambush for Ai. 30,000 to march by night and lay ambush on the west side of Ai which is between Bethel and Ai. This is wise because if any help was to come to Ai it would be from Bethel and the ambush troop will be able to deal with that. Joshua and the rest of the army will attack Ai from the front but they will flee as before and when the people of Ai pursue them, they will be drawn away from the City. At the signal of Joshua raising his spear the ambushed army is to go and attack Ai, and burn the city but they can take the plunder. Had Achan thought of this that God will give them as much as they wanted he should have waited and possess his possession but because of his in-patience, greed and covetousness he ended his life and that of his household abruptly. Waiting on God is rewarding and is blessing. Israel use this ambush method against Egypt in the 6 day war in 1967 and since then Egypt signed a peace agreement with Israel and promised never to fight them again because they lost heavily.

God is never short of ideas and He is never held Himself back from speaking to us through His word, to our ears, spirit and in dreams and He gets our attention when and where we do not expect Him all we need to do is to be sensitive to and obey Him.

We should not take God for granted like the people of Ai did and also Joshua the first time he invaded Ai. For every occasion, we must seek God's mind about what He wants us to embark upon; when He wants us to talk and when He wants us to be silent. Moses made the same mistake of taking God for granted at the water of Meribah (Numbers 20:7-13), instead of speaking to the rock as God commanded he struck the rock twice. This caused Moses not to lead God's people to the Promised Land.

I am not blaming Moses because probably I would have done worse. Actually I have just blown it again few months ago, when He laid it in my heart to get a projector for the back wall, instead of obeying the instruction He gave me to ask Him for anything I need first, I took my own short cut but paid for it by disappointment and misery. No sooner I repented He provided a big part of the cost. The lesson I believe God wants us to learn is to guide against the mistakes these people have made and it will be better for us.

Only last week, two people came begging, the first I know very well and asked him never to ask me for money again because he gets his benefits. The other one came, I did not want to open the door for her, but the Holy Spirit intervened and asked me to hear her story. From the papers in her and I was able to contact people on her behalf and because her benefit will take some time to come, I did help.

What I am saying is that God does not do things the same way all the time; we need to be sensitive to him. I almost stereotyped the second person because of my previous experience with people. I have been duped, cheated and even stolen from.

3. God is all powerful – He gives victory.

The slogan of the second world slogan 'we've done it before, we will do it again' does not always work and in the case of Ai it did not work for them. Because they have defeated Israel before, they were overconfident that they would defeat her again.

Hence the king and his army went headlong after Joshua and his army and little did they know that they have been ambushed.

Once the city was set on fire, Joshua raised his speak which aroused the ambushed army to race to Ai, over took it and set it on fire. Then the Israelites army turned back on them and when they turn back and realised that their city is burning, they must have felt weary and thought what are we fighting for, our wives, children and homes are burnt.

Even if they resisted the Israelites army they have been sandwiched in the middle and God has already given Ai to them as their inheritance. It was the Commander of the Lord's army was the one who fights the battle but through the hands of Israelites army and all the 12,000 people living in Ai was destroyed.

Romans 8:31-32 "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" NKJV

When God promises, He fulfils them. 2 Corinthians 1:20 "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

He promised victory over Ai to Israel and He delivered it. God is telling you too not to be afraid and be dismayed, take courage because He is with you. It does not matter how many times you have failed, it does not mean that you are a failure. It means you are yet to succeed.

Warren Wiersbe quoted the famous British preacher F.W. Robertson's sermon preached on August 12, 1849 "Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes; organize victories out of mistakes."

Many of us would not believe this to be true, but it is the truth. Henry Ford defined a mistake as "an opportunity to begin again, more intelligently." And Alexander Whyte said

"The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings".

Look at Jockeys, when they fall off the horse, they go right back as soon as they feel better. The greatest mistake we can make is to give up when we fail. Quitters are never winners and winners never quit. So do not quit, God will give you victory.

4. God is good – He blesses His people.

Just like Jericho, Ai is to be burnt which is a sign of purification to make it clean of its idolatry and wickedness so that God's people will possess the land clean. Contrary to Jericho which is the first fruit of the land of Canaan that belongs to God, Ai's spoils belonged to the people. And they did exploit.

When your victory is won and the enemies destroyed God will give spoils to you because Proverbs 13:22 says "the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous". NKJV

Proverbs 10:22 "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it".

God wants to bless His people, He caused the Egyptians to bless them when they were leaving Egypt, now He uses the wealth of the Canaanites to bless his children. When and how He does it I would not know but since He has promised every believer to meet our needs, He will do it.

If you feel that you have not been blessed, two things can happen. It is either you are still in the midst of your struggle (battle); but victory is sure because Christ has overcome for you. Or you have a wrong expectation/perception of God's promise. If He promise to bless me with job and I am not looking or too choosy; He promise me good health and I start drinking whisky, smoke tobacco and take other dangerous

drugs or eating unhealthy diets, then I am tempting God. If He promise to make me a millionaire, and I am not in business, may be writing books, giving seminars and getting out there to be known, I might be tempting God.

Conclusion:

There are four categories of people and how they react to instruction like this: 'this is fire don't go near it will burn you'.

The first group who I call the wisest, will hear and never go near and they will not be burnt. They learn from others experience and instructions.

The second group are the wise, they heard you but want to verify your claim, they will go near and when they feel its radiation, they move away. This people learn by verification and exploration.

The third group are normal people. They heard you, go near the fire, feel its radiation and touched it. They get burnt then they will never go near again. These people learn by concrete experience.

The fourth categories are the stupid. They hear you, go near the fire, feel its radiation, touch it and were burnt. They go back there thinking, it can only burn once; they get burnt second, third and even fourth time. These are never learnt people.

You can move from one category to the other depending on the choice you make but I encourage you to make the right choice.

Achan along with the rest of the people in the camp heard the same instruction that Jericho and its spoils belonged to God as the first fruits. But he chose to look and presumably again, covert and took what belongs to God. He stole from God and the consequence was great because God will not deal kindly with disobedience. But God is gracious He will forgive when we repent. Later all what we need and long for will be given to us by the Father who loves His children. Someone has defined madness as doing things the same way and expecting different results. Many of us do not want to change but we expect different results; that will be impossible. If we do that we tempt God and take Him for granted.

'To try and fail is at least to learn; to fail to try is to suffer the inestimable loss of what might have been.' Chester Bernard

When we get it wrong or messed up or have failed many times because of the choices we made, we must surrender and repent immediately, repentance is a sign of humility and strength and God will restore you even beyond your imagination and you will become a testimony.

Christian journey is through the valleys and mountains, ups and downs, successes and failures but whatever you did to your situation and the choice you make determines the outcome. We must never take God for granted and because he has done it one way before he will always do same way would not apply to Him. He is a strategist and has many million ways of doing something.

Consult Him each time you need to make decision and be prepared to meet Him in an unusual way, time and place. He will make himself available and just obey Him no matter how ridiculous and the results will surprise even your enemies.

Be wise, obedience is better than sacrifice and repentance brings forgiveness and restoration.