**Text: Joshua 7:1-13**

**Subject: The Thrill of Victory and the Agony of Defeat!**

Church,when was growing up, I remember on Saturday afternoons, ABC would broadcast a sports anthology TV program called, The Wild World of Sports. And while the program was good because it showcased an eclectic collection of sports from all around the world, the best part of the program was its introduction.

In the introduction, some melodramatic music would come on and then we would hear a voice over where the announcer would say: “*Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport... the thrill of victory... and the agony of defeat... the human drama of athletic competition... This is ABC's Wide World of Sports!”*

And when the announcer said the thrill of victory, we would see several examples of victorious people who had won whatever sports endeavors they had embarked upon.

However, when the announcer said, and the agony of defeat, we would see the video image of a ski jumper who had gotten misaligned with the course and the ramp that he was jumping off of. As a result, he fell off, head first, instead of jumping off the ramp he was trying to jump off of. (If you recall, his head was bobbing around and it looked like he broke his neck when he fell off the ramp).

Now, I don’t know about you but that one scene alone in those 32 seconds of that intro defined the image in my mind of defeat looks like. And what made it so poignant was the juxtaposition of the images of victory with that of the image of defeat. In essence, there was a clear definition and delineation of the difference between the two.

However, what was less obvious were the emotions we felt when victory quickly shifted to defeat. We were forced to instantly shift our jubilation and celebration to shock and awe, where all we could say was ouch, or wow! That looks like it was painful.

Perhaps, the most important thing that we may not have considered were the events that led up to both the victory and the defeat.

Unfortunately, the intro did not give us enough information in order to make such a determination. However, in real life, we can be certain that for every true victory, there is some great sacrifice and preparation which no one sees.

In other words, for most victories, we only see the glory, but we don’t always know the story of what went into those victories.

On the other hand, behind many defeats, there are either some unfortunate circumstances; some lack of preparation; or some gross misjudgments.

In the case of the Israelites in our text, there were at least four things which lead up to their defeat by the people of Ai. First, they were operating under a foul spirit. Also, they underestimated the strength of their enemy. They overestimated their own strength. And lastly, it is possible that they took God for granted in the process.

First things first, let’s look back at what got the Israelites to the point that they had gotten to here in Chapter 7 of Joshua. In Joshua Chapter 6, the Children of Israel had just conquered the City of Jericho.

And if you know the story, then you know that they experienced the thrill of victory because they closely followed God’s instructions on how to be victorious.

Specifically, God instructed them to march around the city once a day for six days, and then on the 7th day they were too march around the city 7 times and then give one long blast on the rams’ horn. Then, after they did that, a shout broke out, and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.

Well, of course, when we hear this story, we break out in a shout, because we can feel the thrill of victory that the Children of Israel felt they had followed God’s instructions and as a result, He held did what He said He would do—and gave them the thrill of victory.

However, as we fast forward to Chapter 7, we are forced to shift from the thrill of victory to the agony of defeat.

Here, we find the Children of Israel celebrating their victory at Jericho. But, just as quickly as they had come out of that battle, then they found themselves facing yet another battle.

Here, they were facing the people of Ai which was a smaller town than Jericho. So, most likely, because they were still riding high on their recent victory over a formidable foe, they probably felt empowered and a little beside themselves and as a result, they were in danger of defeat.

Now, this is a cautionary tale because 1 Corinthians 10:12 says *wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall.* However, the Children of Israel did not take heed. Instead, they jumped out there without God’s guidance and as a result, they had to experience the agony of defeat.

And if we look closely at our text, we see that they were defeated because they found themselves operating under a foul spirit.

We know this so because verse 1 of our text tells us that Israel had violated the instructions about the things set apart for the Lord.

As a result, this violation activated a foul spirit which hovered over the Nation of Israel like a dark storm cloud that would not go away.

You see what had happened was, God had instructed the Israelites to destroy everything that belonged to the Canaanites who lived in the City of Jericho. However, the only things that were not to be destroyed were things that were made out of silver, gold, bronze or iron. Instead, those things were to be kept and brought to the treasury of the Lord.

However, a Isrealite named Achan stole 200 sheckels of silver and a bar of gold for his own use and as a result, a foul spirit was released over the entire Nation of Israel.

In other words, because of one man’s greed and disregard for the Word of God, the entire Nation of Israel was put in a foul Spiritual predicament because God was not pleased. Therefore, they no longer experienced the thrill of victory. Instead, they experienced the agony of defeat.

Isn’t that interesting--how one man’s greed and arrogance can set in motion a foul spirit that so pervasively and negatively impacts an entire nation?

Well, that’s what happened here in our text, and because of that the leadership of the Israelite Army underestimated the strength of their enemy and overestimated their own strength. Let’s look to our text in vv. 2-5 for clarification. (READ)

In other words, because they were operating under a foul spirit, they were duped into believing that they were far more superior than their enemy, and as a result they both underestimated their enemy and overestimated their own strength. And of course, that’s a big mistake.

That kind of reminds me of David and Goliath where Goliath talked all that trash about how big and bad he was and then he got the beat down from little old David who was just about 14 or 15 years old.

Now, here’s another cautionary tale. We should never underestimate the enemy or overestimate our own strength because pride and arrogance always comes before a fall even if it seems like we are winning right now.

And certainly, this is where we are right now with the Coronavirus. Although some jurisdictions are repealing the stay at home orders and are reopening their economies, COVID-19 is still claiming lives.

In other words, some are celebrating some form of the Thrill of Victory over the virus, but what we haven’t yet experienced is the fullness of the Agony of Defeat. It’s just like the Children of Israel who arrogantly and ill-advisedly ran up that hill to the town Ai only to get chased back down-- while losing lives that did not have to be lost.

This is super-important because I believe some have either underestimated the strength of vile disease because it has not impacted them directly; or they have overestimated their own strength.

Let me give you a statistic. In the past 8 weeks, as of yesterday, we have lost 88,538 lives in the US due to the Coronavirus. However, we lost 58,220 lives in the Vietnam War which lasted for nearly 20 years under the leadership of 5 Presidents.

At the same time, the death toll is still rising daily because they

have not found a cure, or a vaccine. In fact, they have only begun to offer testing to people who are not essential workers or are not people who are showing symptoms. As aresult, there are people walking around who are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic who have not been tested.

Therefore, what that means is that it is not time for us to start celebrating because some governors have reopened their economies. This is so because what we should know is that that they are doing so because they are experiencing political pushback by foolish people who have underestimated the enemy or have overestimated their own strength.

In other words, things are reopening for political and economic reasons but not because we have won the war over the virus. Instead, the opposite is true. We are losing and because of that we ain’t seen nothing yet.

Therefore, while we may have the cheap and temporary thrill of victory, we have not yet fully experienced the agony of defeat.

Now, I don’t know about you but I don’t want to see it nor do I want to experience it.

Now, I say this because the Agony of Defeat is debilitating, and discouraging especially after briefly experiencing some form of the Thrill of Victory.

Well, essentially, that’s what happened to the Israelites in our text.

In verses 4-5 it says, the men of Ai chased the Israelites from the town gate as far as the quarries, and they killed about 36 men who were retreating down the slope. Then, the Israelites became paralyzed with fear at this turn of events, and their courage melted away.

In other words, because they ran up that hill before consulting with God, and because they were operating under a foul spirit, and because they underestimated the enemy and overestimated themselves, they had to endure more agony, and lose more lives than what was necessary.

This is also important to note because the agony they felt also caused them to question God. We know this because in verses 6-9 we find Joshua on his face discouraged and in dismay. (READ 6-9).

In other words, Joshua just could not understand why God would bring them over the River Jordan and would allow them to experience the Thrill of Victory at Jericho, only to cause them to experience the Agony of Defeat.

Naturally, it did not make any sense to Joshua. However, what Joshua didn’t know is that the real cause of defeat was the underlying foul spirit which had supernaturally permeated the atmosphere. We know this because in verses 10-12, God spoke to Joshua to let him know what was really going on. (READ).

Church, perhaps we can glean from this because the reason why things seem to be falling apart in this world is because there are a lot of hidden things, and a lot of lies, that are happening right before our very eyes. As a result, it seems like there’s not much we can do about it but pray.

However, there is something we can do if we keep experiencing the Agony of Defeat in our own personal lives.

The first thing we can do is: **Keep It 100 with Ourselves**.

In other words, we might be experiencing defeat in our lives because we too might have some hidden things in our hearts, our minds and souls that are not pleasing to God.

We have to consider our motives as to why we do what we do and why we say what we say. And we also have to ask ourselves if we are self-willed or if we are seeking vainglory.

At the same time, we have to ask ourselves if we are prideful or rebellious. This is important because each of these things can cause us to be at enmity with God and with each other.

In fact, all of these things are foul spirits and may give rise to the Agony of Defeat.

Now, if we are not sure then we can always ask God to show us what we’ve really got going on deep down in our souls. Perhaps, that’s why King David said in Psalm 139:23-24, Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Again, this is important because those hidden things in us are most likely the things that keep us from truly and fully experiencing the Thrill of Victory, and are the things which continuously cause us to experience the Agony of Defeat.

Then, the next thing we can do is: **Ask God to Deliver Us From Any Hidden Thing**.

That’s what God instructed Joshua to do in verses 12- 13 of our text.

He said, “I will not remain with you any longer unless you destroy the things among you that were set apart for destruction. Get Up! Command the people to purify themselves in preparation for tomorrow.

For this is what the Lord is what the Lord, the God is Israel says: Hidden among you, O Israel , are things set apart for the Lord. You will never defeat your enemies until you remove these things from among you.”

Now, one thing we should know is that God realizes that we are not able to deliver ourselves. However, we can be delivered if we have a desire to be delivered. And when we do have that desire, then it is God who does the delivering.

We know this because God said it, over and over and over again. He said it in:

Psalm 34:17 – when He said: [The righteous] cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

Then, in Psalm 107:6 – He said: Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, [and] he delivered them out of their distresses.

In Psalm 50:15 – He said that we can call upon Him in the day of trouble: [He] will deliver us, and we shalt glorify Him.

Then, in Psalm 34:4 – King David said: I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

2 Peter 2:9 says: The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

In Galatians 5:1, the Apostle Paul said- Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Now, we know all of this is possible because when the Lord Jesus Christ was being nailed to the Cross, He also nailed all of our sins to the Cross.

We know this because Ephesians 4:13-15 says, you were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away.

Then God made you alive with Christ, for He forgave all our sins. And He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the Cross.

In this way, He disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by His victory over them on the Cross.

You see, it was at the Cross, at the Cross where I first received my sight, and the burdens of my heart, rolled away.

You see, it was there by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all the day!

In other words, today, we can be happy because it was at the Cross, and it was because of the Cross that we are able to receive our deliverance. (fears, doubts, hidden things, wrongful motives, pride, rebellion, etc)

And because of that, we can truly experience The Thrill of Victory and NOT the Agony of Defeat.

Now we can all say:

“*Spanning the globe, because of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, we can truly and fully experience the thrill of victory... and NOT agony of defeat...because He Got Up! We Get Up from whatever’s got us down in life.*

Amen!