

## INTRODUCTION

I've heard lots of wonderful comments about our Stones of Remembrance emphasis last Sunday. But one guy said to me, "You are a pretty brave preacher to pass out rocks in the middle of your sermon!" Sometimes folks have been known to toss a few rocks at the preacher. In fact I remember hearing a funny story about a pastor who went to serve in a church with a reputation for being tough on pastors. When he moved into the pastor's office, he noticed the former pastor left three sealed envelopes in the desk. The instructions said, "When you get in trouble open one of these envelopes." Everything went pretty smoothly for a few months but then a group in the church started griping about something they didn't like. The new pastor opened the first envelope and it said, "Blame the former pastor." So, the young pastor told everyone the problems in the church were because of the mistakes of the former pastor. They accepted that and everything smoothed out. A few months later, another group of folks in the church got in an uproar and were causing problems. He opened the second envelope and it said, "Blame the denomination." So the young pastor preached an entire sermon saying all the problems in the church were the fault of the denominational office. Everybody accepted that, and the storm blew over. After several months of calm, the church lived up to its reputation for meanness and another group started complaining and murmuring about the pastor. So once again, he went to his desk drawer and opened the final envelope. Inside he read these words, "Prepare three envelopes..."

Speaking of envelopes, you aren't going to receive three but everybody will receive this one envelope in the mail this next week. It is an envelope for you to use to make your special Share the Joy Dedication offering on May 6, two weeks from today. Next Sunday, we will move into our new facility. The total cost is about \$26 million and you have given almost \$21 million—what a miracle! But we will enter the building still owing almost \$5 million. We are fully prepared to finance this amount and pay it off over time but I believe many of you want to join me in paying off a large portion of this remaining debt. On May 6, I am asking you to bring a special Dedication offering for the building. That's what this envelope is for but what you give may not fit in this envelope. A great portion of the money already received over the past three years has come in as stock or other securities. That is a wise gift, because if you donate securities to the church, you may claim the current value as a contribution, and neither you nor the church pays any capital gains tax on that gift. For more information, just call our Finance office.

I'm simply asking you to pray and ask God to speak to your heart. Ask Him to suggest a specific gift amount that would represent a sacrifice for you. If you don't "choke" when you first hear an amount, it's probably not a sacrifice! Please start praying about this in earnest. Dedication Sunday is in two weeks and next Sunday, I am not going to say one word about your Dedication gift. The entire theme of the service next week is lifting up the name of Jesus. Today is the last time I will speak to you about your Dedication Gift before May 6.

As we stand on the threshold of entering into a new adventure of faith, I must issue a warning: **DON'T LET GREED SPOIL YOUR MIRACLE.** This is not a time for us to be stingy with God. In the wonderful Book of Joshua we have a tragic story of how greed can spoil God's miracle. I want us to look first at the miracle of Joshua and then we will consider the tragedy of Achan.

## I. JOSHUA AT JERICHO: THE TREMENDOUS LESSON OF FAITH

(5:13-15) Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

"Neither, he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

So, the Lord gave General Joshua his marching orders. Instead of military marching orders, it was an order of worship. They were commanded to take the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the Word of God and the Presence of God, and seven priests were to carry it, preceded by trumpets that were to play. Then all the people were to march around the city in procession. It was to be done every day for six days, then seven times on the seventh day. Look in Joshua 6:15 to see what happened:

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! The city all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destructions and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."

When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

Jericho represents a roadblock on the pathway of progress. Anytime we are moving forward in the Lord's will, Satan throws up fortresses to retard our growth. As a church, we stand before a mighty Jericho as well. There are going to be obstacles and opposition every step of the way. Here are some practical lessons from Joshua:

### 1. You're never too old for a fresh encounter with the Lord

We see Joshua walking near Jericho. It was probably night; and like every good military commander, he was gathering intelligence on how to capture the massive fort. He was probably calculating how many ladders, soldier, spears and battering rams he would need. Suddenly he met another soldier with a drawn sword. At first, he was confused about whether he was a friend

or foe, so I imagine Joshua drew his sword as well and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” This mighty soldier answered in a strange way. He said, “I didn’t come to take sides...I came to take over. I’m the real commander of the Lord’s Army!” At those words, Joshua falls to his face and begins to worship.

Who was this commander? Most conservative scholars suggest this is one of those rare appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ—a theophany. I tend to agree it was an appearance of the Lord Himself rather than an angel. Angels never accept worship. Remember in Revelation 19:10, the Apostle John is so overcome he falls at the feet of that angel and begins to worship? The angel had a fit and said, “Do not do it! Worship God!” This Commander, however, accepts Joshua’s worship and then He says the same thing God said to Moses forty years earlier: “Take off your sandals for this is Holy Ground.” So I think, Joshua encountered the Lord.

How old was Joshua? We don’t know but his friend Caleb was 85. Joshua was a grown man forty years earlier when he scouted out the Promised Land. I suspect he was at least 70 years old. All our 70+ folks, raise your hands. We are the younger generation but we are looking to you who have been around longer than us for spiritual leadership. Will you be a “Joshua” or a “Caleb” who is still open to fresh encounters with the Lord? Or do you make the mistake of thinking the greatest experiences you will ever have with the Lord are in your past?

I’m 48 years old now and I prayed a prayer 30 years ago when I was only 18 years old. I was so fired up about Jesus then I had to backslide to go to sleep at night! I asked God then, “Lord, no matter how old I become, don’t ever let me lose my zeal, my excitement, and my enthusiasm for you.” Do you know why I prayed that prayer? Because I looked around me as an 18-year-old fanatic and saw old, dull, apathetic 40-year-old Christians and I said, “I don’t ever want to be like that!” That’s why I get excited when our folks cheer when I say, “Open your Bibles!” I think we get excited every time somebody is saved or baptized! I am still open for some fresh encounters with Jesus, are you?

## **2 Your battle is won on your face before the Lord**

When Joshua fell on his face before the Lord, the battle of Jericho was already won for him. At that point, he was surrendering. It’s one of those spiritual paradoxes but you will never know victory until you first surrender. He understood the battle was not his; it was the Lord’s. He walked out that evening worrying, “How am I going to capture Jericho?” When he got up off his face, he was not worrying anymore, he was saying, “Wow! I can’t wait to see how God will capture Jericho!”

People ask me, “Aren’t you worried about how you are going to fill that building, pay for the utilities, and pay off the debt? I can honestly answer, “No. I’m just excited about watching and seeing how God is going to do it!”

Before we leave this holy ground, notice it appears Joshua is all alone with the Lord. Note: Public victories are won in private. Some of the deepest, most wonderful encounters you will ever have with the Lord always happen when it’s just the two of you. Anywhere you encounter God is holy ground, even in private. Jacob wrestled with the angel in private but he never walked

the same again. Moses encountered God at the burning bush all alone. Young David wrote some of the beautiful psalms alone as a shepherd. That’s why those of you who never take time to have a quiet time are missing out on the greatest, most wonderful spiritual experiences possible. Folks, I love gathering together to worship Jesus—and worshiping in the new facility is going to be awesome. But frankly, it won’t be as sweet as some of the times I have alone with Jesus on the holy ground of my study. I’m almost embarrassed to confess it but there are times when I am alone that I shout, laugh and cry because God’s presence is so powerful. You may be thinking, “You sound like a fool.” I am a fool. Like the Apostle Paul wrote, “I’m a fool for Christ’s sake.” Whose fool are you?

### 3. Effective faith obeys even if you don’t understand

God gave some peculiar military orders. He told them to simply walk around the city 13 times. The ancient, fortified Jericho was not a large city in terms of land dimensions. It only covered about 8 acres. But it was a city surrounded by two enormous walls 15 feet apart. Each wall was lined with soldiers and watchmen standing at every gate. It was thought to be impossible to capture. Can you imagine the questions running through the minds of the soldiers? Here were some of these mighty Hebrew soldiers, fired up for battle, armed to the teeth like Rambo—ready to attack! And then they hear the battle plan: Just walk around it. I can just hear some of those soldiers, “Oh, I get it Joshua. The Canaanites are going to laugh themselves to death.” What a stupid plan!

Dr. Alan Redpath writes:

“Why had they walked thirteen times around the city in silence? I suggest it took that long for every one of them to realize that it was utterly impossible for them to capture Jericho if God were not with them - thirteen long looks at the enemy, until they became convinced that they were no match for those behind the walls. God made the Israelites walk around the great fortification until within themselves they died to every hope of conquest unless God should intervene.” (*Victorious Christian Living*, p. 105)

There is another good lesson here for us: Whenever you face an impossible situation, you should circle it in prayer many times before you try attacking it on your own. By the way, I haven’t said one thing about it but I have noticed several of our church members walking around this entire block, praying or reading their Bibles. I didn’t say, “Let’s have a Jericho march” or anything, but I appreciate what these people are doing. They are circling our property with prayer. If you are someone who walks everyday, feel free to come up here and walk and pray over the next week—just don’t pray for the walls to come down!

Sometimes God tells you to do things you think are impossible. “Lord, you want me to *what*? You want me to: (1) Tithe? Don’t you know I can’t afford to tithe?” (2) Stay in this marriage? Don’t you know it’s never going to work?” (3) Quit this habit? Lord I can’t make it without that. I’ve got to have it for my nerves” (4) Start working in the church? I don’t have any talent. I don’t have any gifts. There’s no way I can do that.” Folks, just obey God and He will do the rest. You walk around the walls and then shout and He will make them fall. And don’t just walk around

one time, or two times, or twelve times. If He says, “thirteen times” make sure you obey Him! Jericho was a great victory, but that’s not the full story. There is also:

## II. ACHAN AT AI: THE TRAGIC LESSON OF GREED

(7:1) But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan, son of Carmi, 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.

Fresh from the thrill of their victory over Jericho without a casualty, the army of Israel decided to attack the little city of Ai. Ai was so small they only had one sign. One side read, “You are now entering Ai” and the other side of the sign read, “You are now leaving Ai.” They thought Ai would be a pushover! So they just took a small brigade of 3,000 soldiers. Ai is an example of what happens when you try to do things in your own strength instead of the strength of the Lord. The Israeli army was routed and dozens were killed. The rest of them came running back to Joshua like a bunch of whipped pups, yelping all the way. So Joshua complained to the Lord in verse 6:

Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown 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. And Joshua said, “Ah, 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!” [Some will say, “I liked the old building better!”]

(7:10) The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? 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.”

Although only one man stole the dedicated items, God said, “they have stolen.” So, they assembled the entire crowd and started drawing lots to find the culprit. First they narrowed it down to tribes, then to sub-tribes, then to families. The guilty man, Achan thought he got away with his little crime and nobody would catch him. Each time the lot was drawn and the groups were narrowed down, sweat broke out on his forehead and his pulse increased until finally, the lot fell upon Achan. Look at his words in verse 20. This is *not* true confession of sin, it is an admission he acted “inappropriately.” Once he had been caught red handed, he admitted these words: “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: [note how sin progresses from a look to a desire to an act] When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”—That’s about the time they could have sung the old Hebrew country song, “Achan’s Breakin’ Heart.”—Sorry. Because the children of Israel then stoned Achan along with his family. What a tragedy! Because of the selfish greed of one man, Israel experienced defeat and death. Greed spoiled the miracle of Jericho. What do we learn from this terrible tragedy?

## 1. God has the right to claim anything for Himself

God specifically warned the children of Israel *not* to grab any of the spoils of the battle of Jericho; they were to be placed into the treasury of the Lord. This meant it was to be used to maintain the Tabernacle and to provide support for the priesthood. Because the spoils of battle were often connected to a false god, Jehovah forbade Israel from possessing it. Sometimes the booty was destroyed, other times, as here, it was reserved to go into the Lord’s treasury.

As we approach a time when each of us will be asked to give God a special Dedication offering for our new house of worship, we need to understand that everything we possess belongs to God and He has a right to claim as much of it as He will for Himself.

When King David was raising funds to construct a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem, he prayed, “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand...Oh, Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.” (1 Chronicles 29:14,16)

As you pray about what kind of gift you can give to honor the Lord, you need to admit *all* you possess belongs to God. Simply ask Him how much of His own money, or stock, or property, or other valuable possessions He wants to claim at this time.

## 2. Beware the enemy within: self-centered greed

The Israelites thought their greatest enemy was the army within the city of Jericho but the most dangerous enemy was greed. There used to be an old comic strip called “Pogo,” and one time Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” When you think about the potential problems we could face as we occupy our new building, you may think our greatest enemies are the people with the painted buses or the skeptics or the enemies of Christ. But the most dangerous enemy we face may be our own selfishness.

J. Vernon McGee writes:

The worst enemy you have is yourself. He occupies the same skin that you occupy. He uses the same brain that you use in thinking his destructive thoughts. He uses the same hands that you use to perform his own deeds. This enemy can do you more harm than anyone else. He is the greatest handicap that you have in your daily Christian life. There are two factors that make dealing with this enemy doubly difficult. In the first place, we are reluctant to recognize and identify him. The fact of the matter is that most of us rather like him. The second problem is that he is on the inside of us. If he would only come out and fight like a man, it would be different, but he will not. It is not because he is a coward, but because he can fight better from his position within. (*Commentary* p. 16)

We may think greed isn’t as evil as some of the more evident sins of the flesh. But God catalogs selfish greed right beside those physical sins. Paul writes: “Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality; impurity; lust, evil desires and greed which is

idolatry.” (Colossians 3:5) Greed is actually idolatry. You would never picture yourself bowing down before a statue or some man-made god. That’s idolatry! But when you hang onto your possessions and refuse to give them up you are basically saying, “I trust my wealth more than I trust God.” People say, “well, you’ve got to save for a rainy day.” But, my friend, you can trust God during your rainy days.

Selfishness is a mark of spiritual immaturity. When I was a child, I enjoyed attending our annual family reunions because we always had “dinner on the grounds.” I was a pretty rotten brat so all my cousins and I would rush to the front of the line and pile our plates up with much more food than we could ever hope to eat. We didn’t give a second’s thought or consideration to the grownups who hadn’t eaten yet. Fortunately, there was always more than enough food. That selfish attitude was a childish act of immaturity.

The opposite of greed is unselfishness. Unselfishness is revealed in simple areas like where you park, where you sit, how you treat others. Is it “Me first?” Or is it “Consider others more highly than yourself?”

### **3. A “little” sin produces great suffering**

The “little” sin of greed led to the defeat of Israel. Don’t ever think your sin doesn’t hurt others. Achan’s greed led to the death of the soldiers and to the death of his family.

What we perceive as “little” sins are more dangerous than the “biggies.” You would never rob a bank or knock off a convenience store but do you lie on your expense account, deceive the IRS, or even rob God by not giving to Him what He requires?

We’ve all heard about the sinking of the great Titanic. On its maiden voyage in 1912, it struck an iceberg and sunk, taking over 1,500 people to a frigid grave. A few years ago, scientists found the Titanic two-and-a-half miles below the surface of the Atlantic. For years, the accepted theory was that a huge gash was torn into the hull of the ship by the iceberg. Actually, scientists have discovered there were only six small slits spanning the length of the hull that sank the ship. Small sins can ruin a life, too.

Apple farmers will tell you that one bad apple *does* ruin the barrel. That rotten apple releases toxic gas that corrupts good apples. Is there an Achan in our midst? Your greed and selfishness can spoil a lot more than just your own life. You see, we are all in this together. In 1 Corinthians 12:26, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.”

### **4. Don’t whine to the Lord when there is “hidden” sin in your life**

Joshua had a prayer meeting and was complaining to the Lord. God interrupted his prayer and told him to get up and take care of the problem—sin has to be dealt with. If it seems your life is full of misery and defeat and you find yourself crying out to the Lord saying, “What is the world is going on, Lord?” Be careful there is not some “covered” sin in your life you need to correct. There is a time for prayer and there is a time for action.

Do you know another difference between Jericho and Ai? Joshua was on his face in worship and surrender before Jericho but there was no prayer before Ai—and as a result, Joshua was on his face *after* Ai, but it was a prayer of complaint. So, be sure you get on your face *before* your battles, and chances, are you won’t be on your face in misery afterwards.

### **5. Are you being faithful to manage your resources in a way to honor God?**

We are facing a Jericho and part of our obstacle is a financial need. We are going to enter our building owing around \$5 million. The human solution is to finance it and pay it off over time—but is there a Divine method we should be considering? I’m convinced God will receive much greater glory to Himself if we can greatly reduce that amount or pay it off altogether.

I’ve heard some interesting suggestions over the past few weeks. One man, who is a member of another church, told me he had a solution. He suggested since we are going to be having around 5,000 attend our church, we ought to ask each person to make an offering of \$1,000 each. That would equal \$5 million right there. I thanked him, but I explained why I thought that was not the best approach. I explained many folks in our church are children and teenagers and there are many of our adults who couldn’t scrape together \$1,000. The other thing wrong with that solution is that, for many others, \$1,000 is way too small; it’s not a sacrifice. Some of you would blow much more than that on a long weekend vacation or on one visit to the electronics store. An amount that is a sacrifice for me may not be a sacrifice for you. A good theme is: Not equal gifts but equal sacrifice.

Another person told me they were buying lottery tickets every week and had promised the Lord that if they won, they would give 10% toward the building! I don’t know if they were being facetious or not. I told him, “Try telling the Lord you will give Him 90% and you keep 10%,” but he didn’t seem too interested in that solution!

Here’s God’s solution. Everything you have is God’s. Simply ask Him what He would like to “claim” for Himself in this process. Examine your heart and make sure there is no selfish greed there. Achan wasn’t the first or the last person to take what belonged to God. When you take or grab something belonging to someone else it’s called stealing or robbery. Did you know it is possible to steal from God? God may have a very personal message to some of you today. Here it is: “I, the Lord do not change”...“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.” But you ask, “How do we rob you?” “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me.” (Malachi 3:6-9)

Now, I don’t think we owe God 10%. We owe Him 100%. But you don’t give to God because you owe Him; you give because you love Him. This may be a good time for some of you to consider if through the years you have been hanging on to some money God has actually claimed. Because I don’t think you owe God, it would be wrong for me to tell you that you need to catch up on what you owe God. However, May 6 may be a wonderful occasion for you to examine all the wealth God has given you and to make a generous love offering that will represent a real sacrifice for you. A sacrifice is something that causes you to change your lifestyle.



Dr. Charles Howard was a professor at Baptist Bible Institute in Graceville, Florida. I heard him tell the story one time about being invited back to a farm for the anniversary dinner of a couple he married 30 years earlier. As a young man, the husband smoked and he rolled his own by pouring tobacco out of a pouch he kept in his pocket. They were so poor when they got married he didn’t have money for a ring. His bride said that was okay but she mentioned that one day, she would love to have a real pearl necklace. The tough old farmer remembered her desire and he quit smoking. He took the money he normally would have spent on tobacco and paper and he would put it in the pouch. He saved it up for years and years. By the time their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary rolled around, the wife had rheumatoid arthritis and the old farmer had to literally carry her from the bed to the table. After the anniversary meal, Dr. Howard said the farmer carried his wife into the living room and sat her on the couch. Then this old, rough farmer got down on his knees and pulled out his tobacco pouch. Out of the pouch he pulled a beautiful pearl necklace and he lovingly placed it around his invalid wife’s neck. Dr. Howard said the wife was crying, the husband was crying, and he was crying, too. The wife looked at her husband and asked, “These are so expensive! Why did you spend all that money on these pearls?” The old farmer said, “Honey, it’s simply because I love you so much.”

One day when we stand before the Lord, if He should ask us why we gave so much for His work, I hope you don’t say, “Because I loved the church.” Or even “because I loved to give.” I hope you’ll be able to say, “Lord, it’s because I love *you* so much!”

Our Dedication Day is two weeks from today. So will you take some time over the next couple of weeks and get alone with God? Will you get on your face before the Lord and ask Him to tell you exactly what He wants you to sacrifice to honor Him? I believe God will give you an amount or a specific possession He wants you to give. The amount He tells you may seem like a financial Jericho looming ahead, so go ahead, circle it with prayer a few times, then obey Him. And stand back and watch what God does. God is in the process of performing a miracle in our church. Are you ready for it? The only thing that may spoil it for you is greed.

## OUTLINE

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5. Are you being faithful to manage your resources in a way to honor God?

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes