

The Discipline of Defeat

by Denis Lyle

The Discipline of Defeat is a sermon that explores the causes and consequences of defeat in the life of a Christian, and the cure for defeat is to identify and confess sin, and to crucify self.

Scripture: Joshua 7:11, Psalm 10:6, Psalm 139:23, Jeremiah 16:17, Habakkuk 1:13, Matthew 6:33, Romans 14:7, 1 Corinthians 5:1, 1 Corinthians 12:26, Colossians 3:5, Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Sin And Consequences", "Prayer And Obedience"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on 'The Discipline of Defeat' using the story of Achan's sin in the Bible to illustrate how even the smallest sin can have significant consequences, affecting not only the individual but the entire nation. He emphasizes the causes of defeat such as self-confidence, prayerlessness, and disobedience, highlighting the importance of depending on God and maintaining a life of prayer. Lyle also discusses how sin is always exposed before God's watchful eye, and the necessity of identifying and confessing sin to experience victory and restoration.

Transcript

She tried lying on her back. She tried lying on her front. She tried curling up on her side in a tight little ball, but still she felt it! Her host had piled mattress upon mattress to bear her tender frame, yet she tossed fitfully through the night and slept not a wink. "A nasty, painful lump afforded me no rest at all", she complained the next morning. "Surely you are a princess", her host exclaimed. "For only a princess has such a delicate composition to sense, at the base of mattresses stacked twenty high, a tiny garden pea".

Hans Christian Andersen's amusing tale of "The Princess and the Pea", illustrates a sombre reality. Even the smallest irritant, a garden pea for example can cause us great discomfort. So it is with sin. It always takes its toll on us. Always. And sometimes as in the story of Achan it takes its toll on many others as well, even an entire nation. Here was Israel's first and only military defeat in Canaan, a defeat that is forever associated with Achan's name. My, because of Achan's disobedience Israel was defeated at Ai, and the enemy killed 36 Jewish soldiers.

His seemed a small sin, for he took only a tiny part of the booty, but its effects were anything but small. He thought it was a secret sin, locked up in his own heart and his own tent and perhaps within his own family. But before long it was public knowledge to the whole nation. You see secret sin has public consequences. There didn't seem to be any obvious connection between the mound of earth in Achan's tent and the 36 corpses on the road to Ai, and yet they were intimately connected.

Israel was temporarily immobilised because of his secret sin. One man sinned and the whole nation was defeated. The Discipline of Defeat! Now can the Lord use defeat to discipline his children Does God sovereignly permit His children to be smitten by their enemies in order that He might chasten and correct them Does He allow us to be pommelled and punished by our foes in order that we may be stabbed awake to face our real condition before Him Initially, these questions may be considered too daring, too presumptuous, indeed, running contrary to our accepted idea concerning defeat, which is that there is no advantage to be gained in defeat.

But My, a careful consideration of (Joshua Ch 7) will provide us with an affirmative answer to these questions, and will show to us that in a wonderful way of His own, God may produce the gold of profit out of the dross of our defeat. Our subject therefore is, "The Discipline of Defeat", and I want to look at this subject in a 3 fold way. (1) ITS CAUSE What caused this amazing setback Look at (7:4-5) What a contrast this was to all that had gone before. You see so far the story has been a story of success, but now Israel are in full retreat and Joshua is on his face before the Lord asking WHY (6:7) "Why have we been defeated Why has your name been dishonoured Well, why did Israel experience defeat Why do you and I so often fail in our Christian lives What are the reasons What was the Cause of this defeat (a) SELF-CONFIDENCE: Did you notice what they said in (6:2-3) Let me paraphrase it for you, " Don't trouble the whole army Joshua, 2,000 or 3,000 men will do the job".

You see they have come to the attitude of assuming that it was by their force of arms that they had destroyed Jericho. It was as if they were saying: "If we destroyed Jericho in such a signal way, Ai is not going to present us with much problem. Joshua, Ai is only a bump on the road let not all the men go up". (a) My, this was the language of self-confidence: the language of self-sufficiency. Moreover there is no mention here of depending on the Lord. Oh, how quickly they had forgotten that God had given Jericho into their hands. (6:16) My, will you mark this lesson well There is no experience in Christian living so full of danger as the flush of victory.

Victory makes us Vulnerable. There is something about victory that elates: that takes you off your guard: that leaves you open to the devastating arrows of Satan. Its a short distance from the Jericho of Victory to the Ai of Defeat. Israel experienced Victory, the result they became SELF-CONFIDENT! They needed to learn that without God the smallest opposition is too much for us. " My soul be on thy guard ten thousand foes arise: The hosts of sin are pressing hard, to draw thee from the skies: N'er think the victory won, nor lay thine armour down: the work of faith will not be done till thou obtain the crown." (b) PRAYERLESSNESS: " But sure Joshua did pray". (6:7-9 Yes, he did but he prayed at the wrong time.

He prayed after the defeat of Ai, instead of praying before he ever sent the soldiers. You see had Joshua made the same preparation before Ai, as he did before Jericho, the story would have been altogether different. (5:14-15) The Lord would have revealed to Joshua that guilty mound in Achan's tent. My, do you know what prayerlessness does It makes us insensitive to sin. That's why the Lord Jesus said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation". (Matt 26:41) One of the greatest temptations that can come to us after we've experienced blessing and victory is to neglect to pray.

Do you know those times when you've experienced victory and feel you're strong enough and you don't need to pray anymore My, its then you've dulled your sensitiveness to sin. But when you pray in the time of victory, then you'll not have to plead in the time of defeat. You see its only prayer in the hour of victory that makes you realise that you'll face defeat again unless you maintain conscious, and continuous contact with God. Prayerlessness! Is this the cause of defeat in your life How many of us have gone on to

failure because we don't pray: our senses are dulled: we're no longer conscious of the fact that unconfessed sin is still there. (c) DISOBEDIENCE: What actually happened at Jericho Well, Achan stole that which had been devoted to God.

Look at the phrase that is used in (7:11) AT puts it like this: "They have taken some of the devoted things". That is, those things that were set apart for God. The commentator Alexander Maclaren says, "this phrase has the force of a breach of trust and is an expression frequently used in the first five books of the Old Testament to describe Israel's treacherous departure from God". You see Joshua had made it clear that while God had given them the city (6:16) everything in it was devoted to God for His disposition. (6:16-18) Moreover, Jericho was the first city of Canaan to fall, and the spoil was the first-fruits of this conquest and by law the first-fruits belong to God. (Lev 23:10) My, do you see clearly what Achan did He robbed God and appropriated what was Gods.

It was a breach of trust. These things didn't belong to Achan, or even to Israel they belonged to God. Disobedience! Is this the cause of your failure Could it be that you're putting your hand on something that belongs to God Basically, Achan was caught up in the web of materialism, a problem that faces us today. You see we live in a world saturated with things and while it is not wrong to own things, it is wrong for things to own us. Is that where you are Are you being controlled by things Money: Business: Materialism Are you disobeying the Saviour's command, "But seek ye first the... of God... these things... you". (Matt 6:33) 1. (2) ITS COGNIZANCE My, sin never escapes the watchful eye of God.

God's eye detected sin in Israel's camp. (7:11) Now Joshua, the leader was ignorant that Achan had taken the spoil (7:7) but the searching eye of God reached further than the most watchful oversight of the leader. Ill: A College professor was counselling a couple who were having severe marital problems. After some discussion the husband said, "We certainly don't want the Lord to know about this". Ill: Some years ago a pastor worked as a teacher in Lagos Nigeria. One day he gave each of his pupils a piece of paper and asked them to draw a picture of what they thought the Lord looked like.

Almost all the children conceived of God as a big benevolent giant. One little girl however sketched on the page a huge eye. When asked to explain its meaning she replied, "Mummy says God is always watching us: He knows when we're good: or when we steal another child's pencil, His eye see's everything." That little girl had grasped the truth of Scripture: "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do". (Heb 4:13) You see before the eyes of God our: (a) LIVES ARE OPEN: Like an open book.

Noone probably saw Achan carry the spoil to his tent or dig the hole to hide it. His friends walked across that floor without suspecting what was beneath their feet. But when the investigation began can you imagine the thoughts that started to race through Achan's mind (1 Sam 23:6-9 30:7-8 Num 26:55 Acts 1:26) It must have been frightening for Achan and his immediate family to watch the accusing finger of God come closer and closer. "And God knew all the time and I fancied I had covered it all so well".

Does God see our secret sins: our hidden sins My, we cannot escape the all encompassing eye of our Heavenly Father no matter where we are or what we're doing. " For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from My face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes". (Jer 16:17) Is this not the sobering truth that the Psalmist uttered time and again "His eyes behold: His eyelids try, the children of men". (Ps 10:6-13 11:4) My, have we grasped this Are we living in the light of this Are our lives holy: our thinking pure: our speech wholesome Before the eyes of God (a) and our: (b) SINS ARE ODIOUS: It

seemed a light thing to Achan to covet: to steal: to hide but how loathsome his action appeared before the eyes of God.

There are 2 principles we need to grasp in relation to Achan's sin. (1) GOD DOES NOT TREAT SIN LIGHTLY: Someone has said, "Achan at the beginning of Israel's warfare for Canaan, and Ananias at the beginning of the Church's conquest of the world, are brothers alike in guilt and doom". One thing is certain, both Achan's covetousness and Ananias's hypocrisy were severely judged. (1) My, God is "of purer eyes... iniquity". (Hab 1:13) And what seems to "a little thing", a little deceit: indulgence: lie: anger: bitterness: what seems so little in our eyes is odious in God's eyes. (2) NONE OF US SINS UNTO HIMSELF: Achan had sinned but look at the verdict from heaven.

" Israel hath sinned". (7:11) Now why would God blame the whole nation for the disobedience of only one soldier Because Israel was One People in the Lord and not just an assorted collection of tribes: clans: families and individuals. God was dealing with them as a Corporate Body through whom His purposes were to be fulfilled. (Exod 19:5-6 Deut 23:4) Do you know something God's people today are ONE BODY ON CHRIST! Consequently we belong to each other: we need each other: and we affect each other.

You see a drop of poison never remains at the point of infection, but it affects the whole body so when we sin we affect not only ourselves but others. Is this not what Paul's getting at in (1 Cor 12:26) when he says: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it". What happens to one member affects the rest of the members. (1 Cor 5:1-6) You see how we behave affects others. " For none of us liveth to himself", (Rom 14:7) and no man can sin to himself. My, one man in the camp of Israel had failed and the verdict from Heaven was " Israel hath sinned". (7:11) And God withdrew His presence from Israel because of Achan's sin. (7:12) Have we grasp this lesson Do you realise that you cannot grow cold spiritually without lowering the temperature of all around you Do we recognise that a bitter spirit can rob the gospel of its cutting edge on Sunday night (Eph 4:30-32) My, let us take this to heart.

If we are out of sorts spiritually that makes an impact on our corporate testimony. For the victory of this Whole Body of God's people depends on your life personally. The Discipline of Defeat. (1) (2) (3) ITS CURE What was it that ultimately brought victory at Ai Well, there is only way to deal with sin that brings Defeat to God's People and Dishonour to God's Name and that is to blot it out completely. Thats exactly what Joshua did. Sin was confessed (7:20-21) and the sinner was condemned (7:25) For us also in this age of grace: (a) SIN MUST BE IDENTIFIED: Perhaps you're saying: "But I've never be guilty of Achan's sin".

Haven't you My, Achan coveted and to covet is to desire for ourselves what the other man has. To have a hungry longing for our neighbours land: house: car: estate: comfortable surroundings. Does that not strike a responsive chord in your heart Do you not sometimes possess a desire to keep up with the Joneses "Never been guilty of Achan's sin". Haven't you Remember Achan took that which belonged to the Lord. He stole the Lord's portion. Have you ever done that Paul makes it clear that "Upon the first day of the week every one of us are to lay by us in store as God hath prospered us". (1 Cor 16:2) "Never been guilty of Achan's sin".

Haven't you Have you ever touched the life of another child of God and marred it My, this was Achan' sin. "I saw... I coveted... I took... I hid". (7:21) This is what Achan did, and then tried to cover up the consequences. All of us are more afraid of being found out than ashamed of the sin in our hearts. My, is it not time that we looked into the face of our heavenly Joshua and said, " Indeed I have sinned against the

Lord... "(7:20) The Bible assures us, "If we confess our sin...

"(1 Jn 1:9) (a) And then: (b) SELF MUST BE CRUCIFIED: Achan whose name means "troubler", was buried in the Valley of Achor or the Valley of Troubling. Sin being dealt with God could now march with His people and give them victory. Paul speaks of a death in the NT which is not Outward but Inward. In (Col 3:5) he says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth fornication, uncleanness, lusts, evil desires and covetousness which is idolatry". (b) Tell me: are you living a life of defeat instead of victory Are you no longer conscious of God's Presence with you Is it because there is unconfessed sin in your life Then (a) and (b) There is a very interesting verse in (Hosea 2:15) where God says of Israel, "And I will give her her vineyards from hence, and the Valley of Achor for a Door of Hope".

Yes, this valley will be a place where the Jews one day will have a new beginning and it will be no longer associated with shame and defeat. It will become for Israel a Door of Hope when they return to their land and share in the Blessings of the Messianic Kingdom. How wonderful that the Lord is able to take Achor, a place of sorrow and defeat and make it into a place of joy and hope. My, what the Lord is able to do for Israel in a Future Day, He is able to do for us in this Present Day.

The history of Revival in the Church is the story of Christian people putting things right that have been wrong: getting straight with God and when they do the Valley of Achor becomes a Door of Hope! Tell me: do you need to search out any Achan in your own life this... Don't bother about your Christian friends. Rather pray with the Psalmist "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". (Ps 139: 23-24)

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