

# Joshua (Part 6): Dealing With the Past

by Richard Siple

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to God and the consequences of disobedience, highlighting the need for confession, restitution, and honesty in our lives.*

**Duration:** 37:59

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:3-17, Proverbs 3:9-10, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:37-39, 1 John 1:5-10

**Topics:** "Personal Restoration", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of dealing thoroughly with the things in our lives that God is leading us to address. He uses the story of the Israelites' disobedience in taking spoils from the city of Jericho as an example. The preacher highlights that our sin not only affects ourselves but also has consequences for others. He then provides a list of areas in our lives that we should examine, including our relationship with God, our treatment of family and relatives, forgiveness, sexual purity, honesty, stewardship, and covetousness. The sermon concludes with a story about a pastor who was approached by a man before his speaking engagement, highlighting the need for personal restoration and addressing any issues in our lives.

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## Transcript

This morning in a few minutes, I'm going to be speaking from Joshua chapter seven. So you may begin to find that place in your Bibles if you would like. Let's stop and pray.

Now, Father, all things are from you and through you and to you. To you be the glory. And we do not want to be of those that Jeremiah spoke of who did not ask, where is the Lord? We do ask with hungry hearts.

And we pray, come Holy Spirit and speak to our hearts this morning. In Jesus' name, amen. There have been a number of times in my Christian life when I have gone through a painful struggle over my own sins and failures.

At those times, because of my personality, my natural motivational gifting, at those times I have been tempted by two extremes. Prophets are extreme. Either to get into bondage about every little imperfection in my life or to say it is too hard to be holy.

Do any of you understand my struggles? Do you understand my struggles? And that is why I am reluctant about my own message. I am reluctant, not because I don't personally want to have God speak to me. I

want him to speak to me, but I'm reluctant because I do not want Satan to take advantage of the truth of God to bring anyone into bondage when God wants to set them free.

That makes it something I have to be very careful about when I speak as I will this morning. Therefore, right at the beginning of this message, I want you to listen to me very carefully so that you will understand and not have Satan to bring you into some kind of bondage about what I have to say. So I wanna begin by saying, I am not talking about sinless perfection.

And when God says, be holy for I am holy, he is not talking about sinless perfection. God's holiness is perfect. Our holiness is imputed through the righteousness of Christ, hallelujah.

So we are perfect in God's sight in Christ. Then God's holiness is imparted to us through his indwelling presence as he lives out his life through us, but never perfectly. Do you have that? Not an excuse, but just a care.

I am talking this morning about dealing thoroughly with those things in our lives that God is leading us to deal with at any given moment. It's a long statement, so listen to it carefully as I say it again. I'm not talking about sinless perfection.

I am talking about dealing thoroughly, thoroughly, with those things in our lives that God, not somebody else, not even the preacher, that God is leading us to deal with at any given moment in our life. Now, please look with me at our scripture for this morning, Joshua chapter seven, and I'm going to begin reading with the first verse. But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things.

They had taken the city of Jericho. God had said, do not touch anything. Totally destroy that city.

Do not take any spoil, destroy it. But someone had sinned. 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. Now, Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Bethaven, to the east of Bethel, and told them, go up and spy out the region. So the men went up and spied out Ai.

When they returned to Joshua, they said, not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or 3,000 men to take it, and do not worry all the people, for only a few men are there. They just decided on their own.

They didn't ask God. So about 3,000 men went up, but they were routed by the men of Ai who killed about 36 of them. So notice that Achan's sin caused the death of 36 innocent men, fathers of families, husbands, and their families dead because of Achan's sin.

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 and became like water. Then Joshua tore his clothes, 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. Verse 10, the Lord said to Joshua, stand up. What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned.

Now, I'm not going to read the entire story. It would be quite a long chapter, but the result was that they cast the lot, and the lot took the tribe of Judah, and they cast the lot again, and it took some families of

Judah, and they cast it again to finally come down to Achan's family. And at that point, Joshua said to Achan, give glory to God, my son, confess your sin.

Tell us what you've done. And he confessed it. He said, I saw a beautiful piece of clothing.

I saw some silver, some money. I saw a wedge of gold, and I coveted it, and I took it, and I hid it in my tent and buried it there. And they went and found it and brought it and laid it out before the Lord.

And the result was that Achan and his family and all that he had was destroyed. Now, I'm not going to speak about that part of this story this morning. That would be another message about how our sin affects other people, because it does.

No man lives unto himself, and no man dies unto himself, says the scriptures. We never live in a vacuum. So whatever comes into our lives of good or evil affects other people.

When God works in our lives by his grace, that blesses other people. When sin takes over in our lives, that hurts other people. And there's no way we can avoid that.

People say, well, I'm not hurting anybody but myself, but we always hurt others, not just ourselves. So many times when I confess my sin to God, I say, Father, I have sinned against you, and I have sinned against myself, and I have sinned against my family, and I have sinned against this congregation because I have allowed sin in my life, which does affect everyone who touches me in some way. You aware of that, how serious it is? And somebody says, wasn't it a terrible judgment to destroy this man and his family? He was guilty of the murder of 36 men.

And so it was civil law that took over. And as I said, I'm not going deeply into that this morning. But there are some things about this whole thing that I wanna talk about.

And the first thing is the principle of obedience. It is always wrong to disobey God. Is that right? Are you sure? It is always wrong to disobey God.

Is that right? You're still a little weak. Are you really hoping that sometimes it's not really wrong? It is not always wrong to take spoil. That's very interesting.

Because finally, when they had taken care of the sin and confessed it and had God's cleansing, and they went to take Ai, God said, now take the spoil when you take Ai. He said, for Jericho, don't take the spoil. He said for Ai, take the spoil.

So it's not always wrong to take the spoil, but it's always wrong to disobey God. My friends, there are things that are not wrong in themselves, but are wrong for me if God says no. There are things that are not always necessary for everybody to do, but if God tells me to do it, then it's wrong for me if I don't do it.

Are you following me? I'm talking about obeying God. We live in such days of irresponsibility. We live in days when people do not want to be committed.

They don't wanna be committed to their marriage. They don't wanna be committed to their job. They don't wanna be committed to the church.

They don't wanna be committed to anything. If you ask them to do something, it's gonna take much commitment. They don't want to.

They want to be, they don't like this word, but they wanna be irresponsible. They don't wanna be responsible or bound to anything. They want to be able to do whatever they want to do.

But brother and sister, when you become a Christian, you bring your life under the direction of God, right? And I'm not talking about salvation this morning. We are saved by grace through faith. It is a gift of God.

It has nothing to do particularly with what I'm talking about this morning. You're saved by God's grace and the shed blood of Jesus and the work of God. Amen? Hallelujah.

I'm glad that's true. Woo, it's a good thing to have the heart established with grace. But now that I am saved and now that I'm grateful to God and now that I am his child and he is my father and he speaks to me like my earthly father used to do.

And when my earthly father said to me, do that, I almost said Richard do that, but my middle name is Malcolm and they called me Malcolm, but don't tell anybody. And so if he said, Malcolm do that, believe me, I what? You better believe it because he meant business. He never said it to be saying something.

If he said, this is what you do, that's what I did. And if he said, don't do that, that's what I did not do. Now there were some times when it didn't work out like that, but then he had a special place.

And he had a razor strap with which he sharpened his straight razor. And the razor strap was a wide piece of leather and it hurt. And it made me sorry that I had not obeyed my father.

Anybody understand me? Many of you were raised like I was, thank God. So what I'm saying is that it's always wrong to disobey God. And what I'm talking about this morning is obedience.

God said, don't do that and they can did it. And there were terrible, terrible results from his disobedience of God. Now, when you disobey God, you're always sorry for it, always.

Now it's amazing how gentle God is with us and how patient he is with us and how long suffering he is and how he waits so long to discipline us, isn't it? I've gone back to God sometimes and I've been astounded that he didn't discipline me for something. I said, oh, thank you. I don't know how, why you didn't discipline me for that, but I really thank you.

God is so patient, but I tell you what, when you disobey God eventually, you'll be sorry. And when you obey God, you'll be glad forever. And my wife and I were sitting talking yesterday at lunch and we got talking about a phone call that she made the week before last when we were back in Campbell River for a few days.

And she called some old friends of ours down in Gadsden, Alabama, a place where most of you have never been, but where I was a pastor for a few short, very short years. I think, if I remember correctly, around two years, maybe slightly more. And it was a very interesting experience.

Anyway, she was talking with this family and they are dear friends and she was talking to the lady on the phone. Her husband had been on the board when I was pastor there and they just had a great time together. And so my wife and I got talking about that family and we got talking about their children and we just enjoyed remembering these people and their relatives and their friends and all this group of people.

But you know, the reason we could enjoy that and that it was such a joy to us and we got so much satisfaction out of it and so much blessing just thinking about those people is because of one act of

obedience. Because I was a very young pastor. I tried to figure it up recently without sitting down and writing it all out and I probably should have, but I was under 25, I think, or right about there.

And that's pretty young to be a pastor. And in those days, when you were the pastor, you were everything. And I tell you, I was not really ready fully ready to be a pastor.

I thought I was. Then I graduated from Bible college, but they don't really teach you very much. And I really didn't love people very much then.

God really changed me since then and I really love you. But you're just fortunate you didn't get me then. And so things didn't go very well.

And after about two years, the board called me in for a board meeting and fired me. They asked me to resign. And I tell you, it was devastating.

It was absolutely devastating for me. And I just, I said to Anita, I thought I was called into the ministry, but I guess I'm not. I guess I'm a failure.

I guess I'm not meant to be a pastor, blah, blah, blah. And you know, I'm ready to quit. Give it up.

I can't do it. I thought I could do it, but I can't do it. Of course, it was right, I couldn't do it.

That was right. And a couple of the elders came to me and said, now don't you just leave, you stay here and fight. Ooh, that would have been a bad decision.

Anyway, our wonderful district superintendent came in and he put the whole thing together properly and eased me out of there. But it was amazing. I mean, in that board meeting, I had a man tell me that one of the reasons they were asking me to resign was because of the way I tied my tie.

You think I made that up, but I didn't. It was a real, it was wacky. One man said, I really was a good preacher, but I was a lousy pastor.

And another man said, oh, he thought I was pretty good pastor, but I couldn't preach worth a hoot. It was a bad night. And it was a bad number of days afterwards.

And I would have quit, but our superintendent, great man of God, he and his wife just loved us and brought us through it and sent us off to another church that was worse than that one. And with less people too, believe me. And so that went by and about six months after that, as I was praying, God said to me, now what you need to do is write a letter to that church board and confess to them all your failures as their pastor and all the sins that I've showed you and the ways you failed them.

And don't you say one word to them about anything wrong they did. You say, didn't they do anything wrong? Sure they did. But God said, that's none of your business.

You write the letter, humble yourself and confess to them all your faults and ask them to forgive you. And then you leave it. Now we're at the point of obedience or disobedience.

So now what are we going to do? Well, I prayed about that, wrestled with it, dealt with my pride and the part of me that loves to argue, had to really crucify that a long time ago and wrote the letter. Well, I received a lovely letter back in which they acknowledged my confession and said they forgave me. And

then I waited for their letter of confession.

And I'm still waiting. But you wouldn't know how important what happened next was unless you lived in the South. But in the South, they have ever so often things at churches they call homecomings.

And everybody that's ever been part of that church in all its history come back for a day and they have all day meeting and all day eating on the grounds. It's something else. And they try to bring in all our former pastors and everything.

But because I had written that letter and God had used it to bring peace and peace to my heart, after a while, I did get a letter from them. And guess what was in it? An invitation to be one of the speakers at the homecoming. Couldn't preach worth a hoot, but.

And so we went and we had a wonderful time and people hugged us and loved us and it was great. And preached and ate and went home. Well, a couple of years went by.

I received another letter. It was from the man whose wife, my wife was talking to a week ago on the phone. Because he was one of the main instigators in getting me out of there.

And it was a letter asking me to come back and hold a week long revival meeting in that church and to stay with him, with them in their home. Are you with me? And I went back and we stayed in their home. And he and I went out calling together and we prayed together.

And we had a wonderful time and a wonderful meeting. And everything was healed between us. And we became close, close friends.

And I won't take time this morning to tell you how I poured out my life for that man when he lost his leg and should have died in the hospital and how God healed him and brought him through it. And we've been friends for many years. About four or five years after that, I got a letter from their district superintendent and saying that church had approached him to ask me if I'd come back and be their pastor.

I prayed about it, didn't go. But I'm telling you this story this morning because I want you to know that it pays to obey God. And there are some of you sitting here who have disobeyed God and you know you've disobeyed God.

And that thing is festering in your life, whatever it is and has been festering in your life for a long time. It's keeping you from spiritual victory. It's keeping you from being a blessing in your Christian life and a blessing for God because there are things in your life that are wrong.

You know they're disobedient to God. You know you're not doing what he wants you to do or you're doing what he doesn't want you to do. And you've not dealt thoroughly with that disobedience.

And you haven't come to a place of surrender and confession and maybe restitution and obedience, but you better do it. You better do it. I've been in ministry 50 years since then.

I wonder, I wonder sometimes how much blessing there would have been if I hadn't obeyed. But it's wonderful to sit there at the table of my wife yesterday and talk about that family and the love between us and the love between us and the people there and know how God had worked because of one step of obedience. And some of you have people you need to forgive.

Some of you have dishonest things that you have done in your past. You know it was dishonest. You've tried to cover it up.

You've tried to justify it. You've tried to excuse it. You've tried to explain it away.

You've tried to argue with God about it, but it was wrong. It was dishonest and you have to make it right. And God is not going to let you be blessed until you do.

And the nation of Israel represents an individual Christian who covered the sin and whosoever covers his sin shall not prosper, but who so confesses and forsakes it shall have mercy. And so God is calling on us about this matter of obedience and disobedience. And God is saying, you've got to go back and deal with that issue and get it straightened out and cleansed and obey me.

Then there's the principle of honesty or confession. In 1 John 1, verses five to 10, we read these words. This is the message we have heard from him and declared to you that God is light.

In him, there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another in the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanses us from all sin.

At the close of a sermon, a woman went to the preacher and asked, what is the matter with me? Every time I go to church, I start itching terribly. She pushed up her sleeve and showed him the rash on her arm. I go crazy trying to keep from scratching the life out of myself.

I'm going to stop coming to church. I can't stand it any longer. The minister asked, does this happen in other churches? She replied, any church.

He asked if he might discuss the problem with her doctor. She gave him permission. Now, this is interesting.

The medical doctor said, this woman is suffering from what might be called internal eczema. She's mentally scratching herself on the inside and I haven't been able to get at the real cause. Later conversation, the pastor's office brought out the fact that this woman had been systematically stealing money from her employer over a period of years.

She began by borrowing small amounts she intended to pay back. She took more and more until now it amounted to a good many thousands of dollars. The pastor said the only cure was confession and restitution.

They'll fire me, she said. He replied, maybe so. Nevertheless, she did it.

She was fired. Her employer said he had no choice, but he added, since you've made this admission voluntarily and since you say you'll pay the money back, I won't prosecute you. In fact, I'll give you a reference as a conscientious person.

The woman, by the way, was immediately cured. And I haven't time to tell about the woman, but I had a woman in a church I pastored who had all kinds of skin problems, but I found out she had a lot of other problems. And when we checked with what the doctor had said to her about her skin problems, he said it is an emotional problem, not a physical problem.

And I said to her, it's a sin problem. And so it was. Then there's a principle of repentance.

Total cleansing means restitution where indicated. 2 Corinthians 7, 10 and 11 says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation "and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." See what this godly sorrow has produced in you, what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. Here is somebody who's really repenting, who says, I'm gonna make this right as far as I can possibly make it right.

So Dr. Clarence Lieb of New York had a patient with headaches, fatigue, tension, rapid pulse, gastric disturbances, et cetera, et cetera. He finally suggested that his troubles were caused by a disturbed conscience, but the man denied it. Finally, however, the man confessed the following sin.

He was executor of his father's large estate. He had arranged things so his brother living in Europe was receiving far less than the will indicated. The man protested frantically that he could never tell his brother who trusted him completely.

Finally, under Dr. Lieb's urging, he wrote a long letter making full confession and financial restitution. Dr. Lieb escorted him to a mail drop in the hall of the medical building. The man dropped the letter in the slot, took a deep breath, turned, looked the doctor in the eye and said, thanks, I feel as if a terrible weight has been lifted off me.

I feel good, I know I'm cured. I'm just talking about one little result and I'm not even talking about our conscience this morning. But my friends, if we try to cover our sin, no matter how many years go by, if we try to cover our sin, we will not prosper.

You say, what can I do? Well, it wouldn't hurt to do a personal moral inventory and I'm going to just read it off to you quickly and it's based on the 10 commandments. So let me ask these questions. Does God have first place in my life? Have I put anyone or anything ahead of God? And there's thousands of Christians that have, they're guilty of idolatry.

Do I treat God and sacred matters with reverence? Am I taking adequate time from my relationship with God and my personal restoration? Number four, am I treating my family and relatives right? Number five, is there anyone I need to forgive? Number six, am I practicing sexual purity? Number seven, are all my dealings honest? Number eight, do I speak the truth in fact and intention? Number nine, do I practice stewardship in regard to my mature possessions or in my covetous? And I want to close with this this morning. A well-known pastor was in a city away from home to speak. Right before he was to go on the platform, a man rushed up and wanted to talk.

I can't now, the minister said, but I will after the meeting. He gave the minister his card. After the meeting, the man was nowhere around.

The card showed him to be a prominent man in the city. Back at the hotel, the minister decided to call the man. The man was surprised and said, I just wanted you to pray with me.

I thought if you would pray with me, perhaps I could get some peace. There's nothing to prevent us from praying together on telephone right now, replied the minister. I never heard of that, said the man.

Why not, asked the minister. Phone is simply a gadget of communication. You are some blocks from me, but by means of the telephone, we are together.

Besides, the Lord is with each of us. He is at both ends of this line and he is in between. He is with you and he is with me.

All right, he conceded. I'd like to have you pray for me. The minister prayed.

When he had finished, he heard sobbing at the other end. Won't you pray, asked the minister. I can't talk, the man said.

Well, go on, cry for a minute or two and then pray, said the minister. After a few moments, the man started. First hesitantly, then with a great rush, he poured out his heart.

It was filled with hate, frustration, and failure, a mass of it. Finally, he prayed plaintively. Dear Jesus, I have a lot of nerve to ask you to do anything for me because I never did anything for you.

I guess you know what a no account I am, even though I put on a big front. I am sick of all this. Dear Jesus, please help me.

Then the minister prayed again. Lord, at the other end of the telephone wire, place your hand on my friend and give him peace. Help him now to yield himself and accept your forgiveness and your peace.

There was a long pause in the man's voice saying, I shall always remember this experience. And I want you to know that for the first time in months, I feel clean inside and happy and peaceful. My friend, all around us and even within the church are many of God's precious children who are struggling and who wonder why they've never been able to accomplish much for God.

But there's something buried in the tent, something covered up, something, some disobedience, some sin, something that needs to be dealt with thoroughly. Let us bow in prayer. I'm going to ask for us to stand with our heads bowed and our eyes closed.

Just quietly standing, our heads bowed and our eyes closed in prayer. On the right side of the platform, there is a prayer room. It's been prepared with a carpet on the floor where you can kneel if you like.

There are chairs there where you can kneel or you can sit, whatever's comfortable for you. And there's some of you who really need to spend some time in there in prayer before we leave this morning. You know that God's pulling at your heart.

And so while we're just standing here quietly in prayer, no one looking around, I want to invite you to just make your way forward and up to the right, up the steps to the right side of the platform and into that prayer room where it's private and where you can meet with God before you leave this morning and say yes to him. Whatever he's saying to your heart, whatever it is, say yes, Lord, I'm ready to obey. And we're going to just stand here for a few moments in quiet prayer.

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