

Boldly Going Where No Man Has Gone Before – Part 9

“Will God’s Presence Be With Us?”

1. As we have studied the book of Joshua, and have watched the Israelites begin their journey into the promised land, it is important for us to remember the parallels between their actions and ours.
 - a. They were setting up a brand new kingdom, a kingdom that was promised as theirs, but they would have to battle for its possession. While God had given it to them, they would still need to “take” it as their own. They would have to DISPLACE the pagan residents of the land, and establish this new kingdom of God’s rule in the land.
 - b. Likewise, Christ commissioned us to “go” into our promised territory, “all the world” to make disciples of all nations, to displace the influence of the “kingdom of darkness” and replace and release the “Kingdom of Heaven” in its place.
 - c. The ability of Israel to be successful was dependent upon them doing what God was training them to do in the wilderness...which was to “follow His presence and do what He said to do when He said to do it.”
2. Have you ever suffered a defeat or setback in your walk with God? Today we will look at the causes of victory and defeat when we are faced with the impossible.
 - a. Background: Israel has conquered Jericho, that city that stood between them and their promised land. God had given them strict orders to destroy everything in the city, and that they were to take nothing for themselves.
 - b. Joshua 7: 1-13 *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. 2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there." 4 So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, 5 who killed about thirty-six of them. 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. 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. 7 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! 8 O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? 9 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" 10 The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? 11 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. 12 That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. 13 "Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.*
 - i. The people of Israel had previously been victorious in battle, against a powerful enemy behind powerful walls. Now they face an inferior enemy and when the time for the battle comes, they lose all courage and run away. It seems that just a handful of enemy routs thousands of Israelite warriors. How could this be?

- ii. During the conquest of Jericho, one man (yes, just one man) took items that were supposed to be either destroyed or devoted to God. He took them and hid them in his tent. The Israelites didn't know this, yet they lost a battle. Joshua felt the brokenness.
 - 1. How could one person's sin cause the entire nation to suffer a defeat? Let's find out!
 - c. Let's back up a bit and remember why the Israelites were to be successful in their conquest.
 - i. In Joshua chapter one, which we read about 8 weeks ago, God gave them a wonderful promise: *"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."* (Joshua 1:7-9)
 - ii. Only one thing would ensure their victory. Only one thing would ensure their courage. Only one thing could give them success. It showed up here and it showed up in our passage about Ai: *"I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction."* Do you see it? **Success was only possible through the presence of God.**
 - iii. When sin entered the community, even though it was only through one man, God withdrew His manifest presence from them.
 - iv. What I think is noteworthy is that the nation didn't even notice the absence of God's presence until they lost. They went on as if God was with them. But when faced with their adversaries, their courage melted because the presence of God wasn't in their midst. They turned tail and ran!
 - 1. I wonder if we notice if God's presence was absent?
 - d. Do you remember what God told Moses when Moses questioned God's wisdom in confronting Pharaoh? Ex. 3:11-12 *"But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you."*
 - e. In case that doesn't convince you of the importance of God's presence, consider Jesus' final words to His disciples after giving them the "impossible commission." (yes, I said, impossible).
 - i. *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Mt. 28:20)
 - ii. **God's presence is the prerequisite for courage to face the impossible.**
 - f. King David said in Psalm 16:8 *"I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved."*
 - i. He made a conscious decision to keep the Lord conspicuous and as a result was rarely short of courage to meet his enemies.
3. For the Christian, **God has promised His presence with us ALWAYS, yet we often face the impossible and wilt. Why is that?**
- a. It is *because we do not live in the awareness of His presence.*
 - i. We live lives preoccupied with everything else other than an awareness of God's presence.
 - b. First let me say that I believe that we can cultivate our awareness of God's presence. It is part of our part in the relationship with God. In fact, it is one of the most important parts of our relationship with God.
 - i. Imagine if you got married but immediately after the honeymoon, you moved miles apart and lived in separate houses and only had visits on weekends. Maybe you'd talk on the phone and write letters to each other every day or so, but what kind of substitute is that for intimacy?

- ii. People do that all the time with God! The only time many of us spend in worship or enjoying the presence of God is on Sunday morning for a few brief and sometimes fleeting moments.
 - 1. Speaking of Sunday mornings: I want you to observe something...have you noticed that God seems to move in powerful ways, speaking, healing and saving people in our worship services?
 - a. Why do you think that happens so easily during corporate worship?
 - b. It is because we are corporately aware of His Presence.
 - c. And where His Presence is, lives are changed and touched in a supernatural way.
 - 2. So the natural question should be...why doesn't God move in my life the rest of the week?
 - iii. And the answer is simple. **Because we aren't pursuing His Presence** and we live unaware of His presence.
4. So how do we cultivate the awareness of the Presence of God?
- a. **Awareness - Having knowledge or cognizance, to be vigilant, watchful, conscious, sensitive, mindful.**
 - i. God told Joshua to mediate on His word day and night between the lines where He told Him He would be with Him.
 - 1. The awareness of God's Presence starts with mindfulness of God's actions and words.
 - ii. Awareness is different from simply "feeling His Presence" (you know what I mean, if you have ever sensed the Presence of God in a room, you know exactly what I mean. It might be a physical sensation, or an unexpected emotional response).
 - iii. Awareness though is bigger than just feeling.
 - 1. Awareness is about hearing, seeing, and feeling.
 - 2. You may not feel Him, but if you get a word from Him, it brings awareness to you that He is Present.
 - 3. If you see Him in action, you are fully aware of His presence.
 - 4. We must learn to actively cultivate attentiveness to what God is doing and saying.
 - iv. It is why we let God speak in our services, not just through the pastor or worship leader, but through everyone by the Holy Spirit.
 - 1. We must cultivate our awareness of His Presence because that is where breakthroughs occur.
 - 2. **An overwhelming sense of God's presence has accompanied every recorded revival.** Why? Because the revival cannot occur without the awareness of the Presence of God.
 - 3. Awareness of the Presence of God is what causes sin to be recognized and confessed, it is what produces supernatural interventions by God in people's lives.
5. **We have settled for a far inferior Christian life than what God intended for us.**
- a. **(Getting personal):** As I read Mark 16:17-18 and other passages in the New Testament that describe what the normal Christian life should include, I have to conclude that one of two things is wrong:
 - i. Either the word of God is lying to me,
 - ii. Or I am living far below the standard that God intended me to live as a Christian.
 - iii. Mark 16:17-18 says, "*These signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick and heal them.*"

- iv. Too often we read about the snakes and tongues in this passage and say, “yeah, those are the weird ones” and we throw the rest of the passage out. But the entire New Testament is about Jesus training His disciples to confront the impossible! Jesus intended that you and I be Jesus to our world. He left earth and replaced Himself with eleven who would “do the same things and greater things” who in turn led thousands to replicate His works.
- b. Why not us?
 - i. I believe that **We are guilty of making our theology match our experience.**
 - ii. Yes, we as evangelicals are guilty of this.
 - iii. We accuse liberals of watering down what the bible says about sin, but we water down the promises of supernatural life God has given.
 - iv. We try to explain away why we don’t see God working in supernatural ways in our lives and our ministry.
 - v. Because it seems to be rare, we say, “well, that must be the way God wants it.”
 - vi. And we develop a theology (an explanation) of healing and miracles that makes us feel better about the lacking of supernatural intervention in our lives and relationships.
 - vii. (I am guilty of this – and have been for years!)
 - c. **But what we should be doing**, if we are the people of the book that we claim to be, is to be offended by the fact that we don’t see the fruit in our lives that God says should be there. We should be so offended by this fact, that we should be troubled, convicted, and broken.
 - i. **I am bothered by the absence of biblical power in my life.** How about you?
 - d. Why should we be bothered?
 - i. First of all, the bible says you & I should have God’s power working through us on a daily basis. The bible says that is the normal Christian life.
 - ii. Secondly, if the source of power is the presence of God in my midst, then I must conclude that I am not cultivating the awareness of God’s presence on a regular basis. In other words, I am not living a spiritually intimate life.
 - iii. The realization of these two truths makes me want to cry out in repentance and desperation. How about you?
 - iv. At least the Israelites did so after their defeat at Ai. What about us?
 - e. Why are we so unwilling to pay the price of cultivating the awareness of God’s presence.
 - i. We prefer to draw from our own resources instead of from the powerful awareness of God’s presence.
 - 1. The awareness of God’s presence requires humility and dependency.
 - 2. To maintain the awareness of God’s presence requires prayer, fasting and knee time.
 - 3. It is not something that you can turn off and on like we do with everything else.
 - 4. It is something we must so value and treasure that we never want it off!
6. If we learn to hunger for God’s presence, we will discover that **The Presence of God is always accompanied by breakthroughs in the realm of the impossible.**
- a. We see it from cover to cover in this book. How was Jesus able to heal? Because he literally abided and lived in the Presence of His Father.
 - b. But we are too comfortable to pay the price. We want God to make us comfortable instead of making us radical revolutionaries who confront the impossible with His power and love.
 - i. *Jesus didn’t tell his disciples to pray for the sick.*
 - 1. You don’t need faith or an awareness of the Presence of God to pray for someone. You only need a bit of boldness.
 - 2. Jesus did tell us to do something else. He said in Matthew 10:8 “*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons.*”

3. Obviously we CAN'T do that! Apart from Christ...because He said, "*apart from Me you can do nothing!*" (John 15). Do we simply explain those verses away as for the first century only...or do we recognize Jesus is calling us to a deeper life?
 - c. **Spiritual warfare is often comprised of confronting the impossible with the presence of God.**
 - i. If your experience doesn't match the word of God, don't be a liberal and explain it away. Correct your experience. We are here to enforce what Jesus has done. He is expanding His kingdom and He wants you to be a part of it. He has given You His power to do what He has already done.
 - d. **Jesus won't ask you to do something He can't do.** (real life examples of I can't do it?)
 - i. Yes, he will ask you to do something you can't do!
 - ii. The word impossible doesn't exist in heaven. You will not find the courage to obey unless you are aware of His presence. Which means one thing. We must seek His Presence!
7. Has God made you painfully aware of the lack of His power and presence in your life on a regular basis? He has for me. Are you willing to acknowledge you have settled for far less than what He desires for His church? I am. Are you willing to seek Him more fully and completely, desiring His Presence above all else?
 - a. We have our Spiritual Awakening Weekend coming up in just 3 weeks. March 19-22, Dr. Burton Purvis and Chris Stedman will be joining us to lead us in a time of pursuing God's heart. The deacons and I are calling the church to 21 days of fasting and prayer. I am not asking you to fast for 21 days straight, but instead, to seek God more completely and intimately and to fast from one meal every day for those 21 days. To replace that mealtime with an hour of prayer, journaling, and worship. If you will do this, we will be more united, more empowered, and more aware of God's Presence and activity than we have ever been before as a church. If you will agree to do this, we will experience a greater breakthrough in experiencing His will and His love. During that time of fasting and prayer, I will share more about what we can do to draw nearer and to share what we hear God saying to us.
 - b. Pray for a personal spiritual awakening and hunger for God's presence.

Has God been speaking to you today? Do you feel Him tugging on your heart, inviting you to a relationship with him? You can come to Him today, because He is knocking at the door of your heart. He wants to come in and set up His kingdom in your heart. He wants to make you His child! He wants to wrap you with His love and presence! Won't you let Him? Let's pray!