

PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH • SERMON • THE CONQUERING KING,
PART FOUR

Testimonies of Triumph

God takes the place of our worst failure and makes it the site of a testimony

Testimonies of Triumph

A Sermon on Joshua 8:1 — From the Valley of Achor to the Altar

By A Disciple of Jesus Christ • Pleasant Springs Church • August 16, 2026

Key Texts: Joshua 8:1 • Joshua 7:6–15 • Hosea 2:15 • Romans 8:28 • 1 John 1:7–10 • Joshua 8:30–31

At Ai was a defeat. Thirty-six men dead, an army running, and a commander face-down in the dust wondering what had gone wrong. By the end of chapter eight, that same name is attached to an altar. This sermon walks the road from the Valley of Achor to Mount Ebal — through exposure, judgment, mercy, and recommissioning — and finds that God does not relocate us to a better valley. He renames the one where the worst thing happened.

THE BIG IDEA

God is serious about sin — and God is rich in mercy. Judgment is not the final word in Joshua 7; restoration is coming in Joshua 8. The God who says “Get up” is the same God who says “Go up,” and the place of our deepest failure is exactly the place He intends to turn into a testimony of His faithfulness.

Joshua 8:1 (ESV)

“And the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land.’”

RECAP — WHAT HAPPENED AT AI

In chapter seven we see several things:

Joshua sent spies in to Ai.

Joshua took the spies’ advice.

They proceeded to go up against Ai.

The Israelites got chased out of town and lost thirty-six of their soldiers in the process.

After Jericho, Joshua proceeds toward Ai based upon the report of the spies. But the deeper problem was not simply military strategy. There was a covenant problem in Israel’s midst that Joshua did not yet know about.

POINT

Our battles are often not over geography alone, but over sacred space — the place where God's presence establishes His rule.

Here we see God fulfilling His covenant promise concerning the land while at the same time establishing His rule among His covenant people. And whenever God establishes His rule among His people, He also confronts what competes with His rule in our hearts.

In verse 6 Joshua falls on his face in prayer and lament over the tragedy.

Joshua 7:6 (ESV)

“Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads.”

And in verse 10, God tells him to get up.

Joshua 7:10 (ESV)

“The LORD said to Joshua, ‘Get up! Why have you fallen on your face?’”

Then God exposes the reason for their defeat: sin in the camp.

POINT

Once sin is exposed, a decision has to be made — deal with it or not. And if we deal with it, whose way will we use: ours, or God’s?

The only way to proceed and be victorious is to go God’s way and follow His prescribed way, even when it is hard and painful. Look at what God said:

Joshua 7:12 (ESV)

“Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.”

Joshua 7:15 (ESV)

“And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel.”

Achan, along with his household and his possessions, was brought to the Valley of Achor, and judgment was carried out because of the covenant violation. Think about the weight of that moment. Israel had to confront what sin had brought upon the covenant community.

POINT

God is serious about sin.

BUT THAT IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY

God is serious about sin. But God is also rich in mercy. Judgment is not the final word in Joshua 7. Restoration is coming in Joshua 8.

And there is something buried in that valley's name. *Achor* means *trouble* — the place was named for Israel's worst day. Centuries later God takes that same name up again and makes a promise out of it:

Hosea 2:15 (ESV • MT 2:17)

“And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.”

The Valley of Trouble — a door of hope. God does not relocate His people to a nicer valley. He renames the one where the worst thing happened. The place of Israel's failure becomes, in God's hands, the doorway into hope — which is exactly what happens to Ai between chapter 7 and chapter 8.

In chapter 8 the Lord says to Joshua, “Do not fear and do not be dismayed.” God is giving restoration, encouragement, and instruction. God doesn’t leave Joshua lying in yesterday’s failure — God recommissions him to the mission.

The same God who said to Joshua “Get up” is the same God who said to Joshua and his men “Go up” against Ai. That is recommissioning to service.

And these instructions are not mere suggestions. The last time Israel went up against Ai, they went according to their own assessment. This time, they go according to God’s instruction.

POINT

We often want God to bless our plans instead of waiting and following His plans. There is a difference between asking God to bless what I am doing and asking Him what He would have me do.

Ai had become a memory of past failure and defeat — a regret, an embarrassment. But...

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Romans 8:28 reminds us that God is able to work even through our failures, our suffering, and our disappointments according to His purpose. It does not mean God calls our failures good. It means God is sovereign enough to bring good out of what was not good.

When we agree with God about our sin and repent, we receive His forgiveness and are restored to fellowship with Him. And as we walk in obedience, He teaches us to walk in the victory He provides.

Now Ai is no longer a memory of total embarrassment and defeat, but a testimony of what God is able and desires to do in and through the hearts and the lives of His children.

God can use our defeats to expose our weaknesses and bring hidden things into the light, leading us toward repentance, restoration, and a deeper dependence upon Him.

UNDERSTANDING REPENTANCE

Repentance is often defined as an about-face, a 180-degree turn. But real repentance is a turning of the mind, the heart, and the allegiance — a turning that produces a changed course of life.

1 John 1:7–10 (ESV)

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

The only way to walk in the light is to agree with God about sin and to allow His Word to transform our minds, our hearts, and our thinking.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Once Joshua and Israel followed God's instruction in going up against Ai, Ai was no longer viewed as a failure or a defeat, but as a testimony and a triumph. And so they built an altar of worship to the Lord for the victory He gave them, and they renewed the covenant.

Joshua 8:30–31 (ESV)

“At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, ‘an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool.’ And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings.”

Victory doesn't end the story.

Don't miss what happens next. After the battle, Joshua doesn't simply pack up and move on. He builds an altar. And notice what it is made of — uncut stones, with no tool of ours laid on them. Nothing about it is our craftsmanship. It stands there to point at Someone else.

God never intended our victories to become monuments to ourselves. He intended them to become testimonies of His faithfulness.

Revelation 12:11 (ESV)

“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

SO WHAT?

Instead of telling everyone what we have gone through, let us tell about the One who brought us through it.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER THIS WEEK

1. The place I avoid. Is there a defeat in my life that I have filed away as an embarrassment, rather than letting God make it a testimony?

2. My way or His way. When God exposes something in me, do I deal with it His prescribed way — even when it is hard and painful — or do I look for an easier way of my own?

3. Blessing my plans. Am I asking God to bless what I am already doing, or am I asking Him what He would have me do?

4. The altar. What has God brought me through that I have never told anyone about? Who could I tell this week — not about what I went through, but about the One who brought me through it?

AFTER THE SERMON — AUTHOR & AUDIENCE

The book of Joshua was not written for the generation that fought these battles. It was written down and handed on for the Israelites who came after — people who would live in that land, walk past that valley, and need to know both why God is to be feared and why He is to be trusted. The following background is offered for deeper study, with the Septuagint (LXX) and ESV set beside the preached text.

ACHAN, ACHOR, AND A WORD THAT MEANS TROUBLE

The Hebrew of Joshua 7 is doing something our English cannot easily carry. The verb *‘akar* means *to trouble, to bring disaster on*. Joshua uses it twice in one breath when judgment falls, and then the place itself is named from it — the Valley of *Achor*, the Valley of Trouble.

Joshua 7:25–26 (ESV)

“And Joshua said, ‘Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today.’ ... Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.”

Achan → **Achar**. The Chronicler will not even leave the man’s name alone. Where Joshua calls him *Achan*, 1 Chronicles 2:7 spells him **Achar** — “Achar, the troubler of Israel” — bending the name one letter so that it matches the verb. The Greek Old Testament goes the same way, reading *Αχαρ* throughout Joshua 7. His name became the word for what he did.

Hosea reaches back and picks up that same valley. But here the Hebrew and the Greek part company, and it is worth knowing which one you are reading.

Hosea 2:15 (LXX 2:17) — the Valley of Achor

καὶ δώσω αὐτῇ τὰ κτήματα αὐτῆς ἐκεῖθεν καὶ τὴν κοιλάδα Αχωρ διανοῖξαι
σύνεσιν αὐτῆς.

“And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”
(ESV)

Two different pictures, one promise. The Hebrew reads *petach tiqvah* — literally *an opening of hope*, which the ESV gives as “a door of hope.” The Greek translator read the same consonants and heard something else, rendering it “*to open her understanding*” (διανοῖξαι σύνεσιν αὐτῆς). We say so plainly rather than pretending the two agree word for word. And notice they are not far apart in the end: whether God opens a door in the valley of our trouble or opens our understanding there, He is doing the same kind of work — making the place of failure the place where hope gets in.

The altar Joshua builds is not his own idea. It is obedience to an instruction given long before the battle, and its most striking feature is a prohibition: no tool.

Deuteronomy 27:5–6 (ESV)

“And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones.”

Every other monument in the ancient world advertised the skill of the people who raised it — dressed stone, carved reliefs, the king’s name cut deep enough to last. This one was forbidden all of that. The moment a chisel touched it, it began to be about the mason. An altar of uncut stones can only testify to the God it was built for. That is precisely the difference between a monument and a testimony.

This sermon is the fourth in a series walking through Joshua. The threads here — hidden sin, the unseen powers, the heart made new, and the King who reigns over every rival — each open into a fuller study. Keep growing:

THE CONQUERING KING • PART 3

Stronger Than Us

The week before — the sea, sin, and the rebel powers, and the King who is mightier than the mighty waters.

THE CONQUERING KING • PART 2

Hidden Things

Achan's sin itself — how hidden sin grows in the dark: first he saw, then he desired, then he took, then he hid.

THE CONQUERING KING • PART 1

Conquering the Heart

Where the series began — the Captain of the Lord's host with His sword drawn before Jericho.

A NEW HEART

Born From Above

Repentance is a turning of the mind and heart — and the new heart that only God can give. John 3 and Ezekiel 36.

“And there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”

Hosea 2:15 (ESV)