Timothy Ho Homiletics I Mailbox #82

 **“ROW from Our Way to Yahweh”**

Cyclical Inductive Outline Manuscript on Joshua 8

**Topic: Obedience**

**Subject: Careful obedience to the Lord**

**Complement: leads to blessing, worship, and intimacy.**

**Purpose: The listeners seek to receive God’s encouragement, obey God’s instructions, and worship the gracious God as they see Him at work.**

**Introduction**

1. One of the most inspirational movies that I’ve watched is ‘Coach Carter’, a story of a former star athlete who accepts the job as the new basketball coach at his former high school in the inner city in California, with a team that has performed poorly and isn’t given much hope for their future lives after high school. Coach Carter is set to transform not only the team’s performance, but also the team’s character by instilling discipline, and inspiring hope for their future by enforcing high academic standards. He starts leading them to undefeated success, but along the way discovers his players have not held their end of the bargain, in maintaining their academic standards. This prompts him to close up the gym and cancel practice, much to the anger of the players and the community. His players along the way also get into trouble with the law, but Coach Carter is still caring in His tough love, believing in them and relentlessly pushing them towards not just academic excellence but more importantly character development. The rebellious star player on the team refuses to bow down to his demands, but eventually gets on the program with his fellow peers. The players start believing in themselves as they trust and follow Coach Carter’s demands. Ultimately, the team finds success as the state champions, and each of the players find some meaning in life with respectable futures after graduation from high school. This movie reminds me of the narrative in Joshua 8, where the Israelites were initially unsure of themselves due to their failed first attack on Ai. The Lord encouraged the Israelites to attack Ai a second time and promised victory for them, after the Israelites have repented of Achan’s sin and consecrated themselves to the Lord. Coach Carter in a way is like the Lord, and the players the Israelites in this parallel.

2. Have there been times when you’ve felt discouraged because of sin, thus inadequate for God’s service and His calling in your life? For example, being discouraged due to hypocrisy in your life compared to the message you’re giving in church? Or, having long-standing conflicts with family members or spouse that is opposite of godly traits for spiritual leadership?

3. How can we find encouragement and experience the blessings God has in store for us when we’ve failed Him?

4. In Joshua 7, the Israelites sinned against the LORD by not obeying His command to stay away from the devoted things from their conquest of Jericho. Although Achan was the culprit, his individual act of disobedience affected the Israelites corporately, as the LORD had warned in 6:18. Joshua prematurely led his men to a failed attack on Ai without the Lord’s guidance and knowledge of Achan’s trespass. As the LORD revealed to Joshua Israel’s violation of His covenant which was the reason for their failed attack, Joshua led the Israelites in repentance and consecration to the LORD. He had Achan and his family stoned, then all his belongings burned. The Israelites were at first discouraged, but then found encouragement through the LORD.

5. This leads into the narrative of Joshua 8 which I will preach from today, describing the preparation, execution, and results of the Israelites’ second attack on Ai and the implications for us today. We’ll take a look at what Joshua 8 has to say about God’s character and our response, relating to the Israelites’ second attack on Ai. The first part of Joshua 8, verses 1-13, reveals that we can prepare for the challenges in our lives when we…

**I. Receive encouragement and instructions from God (8:1-13)**

A. In verse 1, we see that the LORD encouraged Joshua to not be afraid, that He has delivered the city of Ai into Joshua and the Israelites’ hands. God’s encouragement to Joshua came after Joshua and the Israelites took disciplinary measures to deal with Achan’s sin, resulting in God turning away from His fierce anger. God initiated Joshua to attack Ai this time, contrasted to Joshua taking his own initiative in the first failed attack. God instructs Joshua to set his people in ambush behind Ai, and this time allowed the Israelites to take plunder, contrasted to last time when God did not allow the Israelites to take plunder in Jericho. When we’re discouraged from some sin issue in our life that is hindering our service to God, we should rest in the encouragement that Jesus has already paid the penalty for our sin, and desires for us to repent and turn towards Him. God wants us to rest in His encouragement, seek guidance or instruction to move forward, and trust in His promises.

B. As God provides instructions, He wants us to listen to them carefully, as He has our best interest. We see that Joshua relayed God’s battle instructions to the Israelites and expected them to heed carefully, as God promised victory over Ai (8:4,7b,8b).

C. Once the Israelites listened carefully to Joshua’s battle instructions, Joshua prepared them for the ambush attack on Ai. He did so by setting them in their respective places, one group to the north of Ai to lure out the men of Ai and another group (5000 men) to the west of Ai for ambush on Ai. An analogy of a trustworthy leader preparing his people for an upcoming challenge can be drawn from the movie Coach Carter, where he has his players sign contracts promising that they will maintain certain academic requirements in order to play on the team. Likewise, we should allow God to prepare our hearts and minds for challenges that He lay ahead for us.

(In the next section on the battle scene, we see that we can experience God’s blessings when we faithfully…)

**II. Obey God’s instructions and guidance (8:14-27)**

A. As the battle starts to unfold, we see that the Israelites started to take steps of obedience. We see that Joshua and the Israelites were able to lure all the men and the king of Ai out of their city in pursuit, preparing for the ambush to come. (8:16-17) Obedience requires steps of action, so when we receive instructions from God, we need to start taking steps towards obedience. Just like when we learn the steps of sermon preparation, we need to start doing exercises to move towards writing the sermon manuscript.

B. The Lord continued to guide Joshua in verse 18, asking him to hold out his javelin towards Ai, as He will deliver the city into Joshua’s hands. The Israelites’ response to God’s instruction was immediate, noted by the words ‘as soon’, ‘quickly’, ‘rushed’, and emphasized by ‘no chance’ for the men of Ai as they were trapped from both sides. Victory over Ai was imminent, as the Israelites obeyed God’s instructions thoroughly. The Israelites could see God’s hand at work, and so do we as the readers. Verse 22 says that Israel cut the men of Ai down, leaving no survivors. When we obey God’s instructions carefully and thoroughly, we can expect to see God at work, keeping His promises. God will help us get out of difficulties when we faithfully obey His instructions to us. For example, if we thoroughly meet each of the items on Dr. Rick’s exegetical and homiletical outlines checklist, we should have a good grade and a potentially good sermon, despite feeling inadequate to start with. Let’s obey the Lord trusting in His promises.

C. We see the Lord handing the Israelites complete victory over Ai in verse 26 with the finishing bloodbath where everyone in Ai was killed. As the Lord graciously allowed the Israelites to take plunder this time around, the Israelites took heed and took the plunder for themselves. Like the obedient Israelites in their second attack on Ai, we can learn to accept God’s gracious offer of grace in our lives, even if we failed earlier. I myself have learned to accept some lecturer’s offers of grace in assignment deadline extensions, even when I feel guilty of procrastination with stressful circumstances. We feel a sense of deliverance each time we finish a major assignment, and it is indeed with the Lord’s help.

(Experiencing God’s grace and victories over our challenges prompts us to…)

**III. Worship our gracious God (8:28-35)**

A. Joshua made the city of Ai a permanent ruin, burning up the whole city, hanging the king of Ai, and piling a heap of rocks over his corpse. He was commemorating God’s deliverance of Ai into the Israelites’ hands, as He had promised. When we experience victory in the face of adversity, it helps to make a remembrance of some sort which reminds us of God’s help through it all, and helps us to reflect on His faithfulness next time face another challenge. Perhaps we can write a journal or blog entry. Or we can write a personal psalm, or create an artwork that reminds us of God’s goodness.

B. Commemoration will naturally lead to worship of God followed by a renewed sense of covenant commitment. In the closing section of Joshua 8, Joshua was inspired to build an altar in worship of the Lord with sacrifices and offerings, and to renew the Mosaic covenant with the Israelites. I’m sure God was very pleased with their act of worship and the reading of the Mosaic Law to all of Israel. From their previous corporate repentance of Achan’s sin, to victory in their second attack on Ai, the Israelites must’ve felt more intimate with the Lord as they worshipped Him and renewed their covenant with Him. For us, experiencing God’s faithfulness in bringing us through trials similarly prompts us to a response of worship and intimacy with Him, when we reflect and remember what He has done, especially through His Son on the cross.

(Now I want you to think back about a situation that I might have triggered earlier in my sermon, where you felt inadequate to take on a challenge that God has given you, due to sin. From the narrative of Joshua 8 that I preached from, I hope you have found encouragement for such situations, where we see: God’s grace when we repent, His initiative with guidance, our call to heed and obey, and God’s deliverance which leads to our response of worship. In summary…)

**Conclusion**

1. God delights in fulfilling His promises to His children when they turn from their sinful ways and obey Him. [Main Idea] Not seeking our own way (Joshua 7:2-5, 9:14) but inquiring of the Lord and obeying Him (Joshua 8) is wisdom for God's blessing and deeper intimacy with Him.

2. When we’re discouraged by our sin, let us first repent and then ROW from our way to Yahweh:

- Receive God’s encouragement

- Obey God’s instructions

- Worship our gracious God

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**Revised Exegetical Outline on Joshua 8**

**“Destruction of Ai”**

Exegetical Idea: The result of the Israelites’ obedience to the LORD’s instruction through Joshua for attack on Ai was promised victory for them and renewal of the law covenant.

**Exegetical Outline**

I. The ways the LORD prepared the Israelites for attack on Ai were through encouragement and instructions for attack via Joshua. (8:1-13)

A. The ways in which the LORD encouraged Joshua were by assuring him of victory against Ai and instructing him on the attack. (8:1-2)

1. The LORD encouraged Joshua with promise of victory against Ai. (8:1)

2. The LORD instructed Joshua to attack by ambush and allowed Israelites to take plunder. (8:2)

B. The way Joshua motivated his army to execute ambush and attack tactics per the LORD’s instructions was by assuring them of victory if they obey the LORD’s commands. (8:3-8)

1. Joshua gave his army detailed instructions for their ambush and attack on Ai. (8:3-7a)

2. Joshua assured his army in God giving them victory and commanded them to obey these orders carefully, which come from the LORD. (8:7b-8)

C. The ways Joshua prepared his men for the attack were by setting some of them up for ambush and leading the rest of them into Ai to engage in war. (8:9-13)

1. Joshua sent some of his men to wait in ambush to the west of Ai. (8:9)

2. Joshua along with Israelite leaders led the rest of his army in the march to Ai, setting up camp north of Ai. (8:10-13)

II. The reason for the Israelites’ successful attack against Ai was their obedient execution of detailed attack instructions. (8:14-27)

A. The consequence of Ai’s men pursuing Joshua’s men as they approached was that they were lured out of their own city toward the desert. (8:14-17)

B. The ways the Israelites followed the LORD’s directions through Joshua were by killing the unassuming men of Ai, capturing Ai and setting it on fire, and capturing the king. (8:18-23)

1. The LORD instructed Joshua to hold his javelin toward Ai to initiate ambush attack. (8:18)

2. Joshua’s men entered, captured, and set Ai on fire. (8:19)

3. The Israelites trapped and killed all the men of Ai who were lured out of the city. (8:20-22)

4. The Israelites captured the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua. (8:23)

C. The ways the Israelites completed their victory over Ai were by killing the rest of the people upon their return to Ai and taking livestock and plunder as God allowed. (8:24-27)

III. The ways the Israelites responded to their successful attack on Ai as promised by the LORD were building a memorial and renewing their covenant with the LORD. (8:28-35)

A. The ways Joshua memorialized the destruction of Ai were by burning Ai, hanging its king, and making a pile of stones over the king’s corpse. (8:28-29)

B. The motivation for Joshua leading Israel in offering to the LORD at Mount Ebal and reading the Law to them was so that they would renew their law covenant with the LORD. (8:30-35)

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**Homiletical Outline on Joshua 8 (Cyclical Inductive)**

**“ROW from Our Way to Yahweh”**

**Introduction**

1. Arouse interest: An illustration from the movie ‘Coach Carter’, depicting the relationship between the high school basketball coach and his academically-troubled players will give rise to curiosity on tie-in to Joshua 8.

2. Need: Have there been times when you've felt discouraged because of sin, thus inadequate for God's service and His calling in your life? For example, when you felt inadequate to preach on a sermon which draws out hypocrisy in your own life?

3. Subject: How can we find encouragement and experience the blessings God has in store for us when we’ve failed Him?

4. Background: In Joshua 7, the Israelites sinned against the LORD by not obeying His command to stay away from the devoted things from their conquest of Jericho. Although Achan was the culprit, his individual act of disobedience affected the Israelites corporately, as the LORD had warned in 6:18. Joshua prematurely led his men to a failed attack on Ai without the Lord’s guidance and knowledge of Achan’s trespass. As the LORD revealed to Joshua Israel’s violation of His covenant which was the reason for their failed attack, Joshua led the Israelites in repentance and consecration to the LORD. He had Achan and his family stoned, then all his belongings burned. The Israelites were at first discouraged, but then found encouragement through the LORD

5. Preview: This leads into the narrative of Joshua 8 which I will preach from today, describing the preparation, execution, and results of the Israelites’ second attack on Ai and the implications for us today.

6. Restatement: We’ll take a look at what Joshua 8 has to say about God’s character and our response, relating to the Israelites’ second attack on Ai. The first part of Joshua 8, verses 1-13, reveals that we can prepare for the challenges in our lives when we…

**I. Receive encouragement and instructions from God (8:1-13)**

A. Receive God’s encouragement and promise of victory upon renewal (8:1-2, prodigal son)

B. Heed God’s commands carefully as He knows best (8:3-8, Deut 28)

C. Take steps towards process of obedience (8:9-13, sports coaching illustration)

(We can experience God’s blessings when we faithfully…)

**II. Obey God’s instructions and guidance (8:14-27)**

A. See God at work as we obey Him (8:14-17, ILL)

B. Obey God’s instructions thoroughly (8:18-23)

C. Take in God’s gracious provisions as He allows (8:24-27, ILL)

(Experiencing blessings or victories in our challenges prompts us to…)

**III. Worship our gracious God (8:28-35)**

 A. Reflect on victory over the difficulty with God’s guidance, and commemorate it (8:28-29, ILL)

 B. Worship God with renewed commitment (8:30-35, personal revival ILL)

**Conclusion**

1. God delights in fulfilling His promises to His children when they turn from their sinful ways and obey Him. [Main Idea] Not seeking our own way (Joshua 7:2-5, 9:14) but inquiring of the Lord and obeying Him (Joshua 8) is wisdom for God's blessing and deeper intimacy with Him.

2. When we’re discouraged by our sin, let us first repent and then ROW from our way to Yahweh:

- Receive God’s encouragement

- Obey God’s instructions

- Worship our gracious God