

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 2nd November 2008

Joshua – new vision new land suffering setbacks - Joshua 7:1-13



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Joshua has crossed the Jordan, defeated Jericho but then comes across the city of Ai - and here the unthinkable happens read 7:2-5! All that had been achieved seemed as nothing in the context of the sickening experience of defeat and failure. After Ai everything - Jordan, Jericho - must suddenly have seemed a long way off to Joshua, and the confidence he had in God's plans and purposes seemed to disintegrate and unravel before his eyes so he pours out his disappointment and frustration to God – read 7:7-9. No doubt most of us have been at the same place as Joshua at some time or another– God is great, prayers are answered, difficulties are overcome, battles are won and life is wonderful, and then comes the sucker punch! This account of Joshua's defeat makes uncomfortable reading, for as well as recounting defeat and disappointment it is a story of disobedience, self centeredness fear and doubt, a narrative that reveals sinfulness in all its ugliness.

Disobedience

God said don't take the spoil from the city. Achan disobeyed and the rest is history. God gives clear boundaries and God gives freedom of choice – to do his will or not. We can choose to obey God – the Ten Commandments, the teachings of Jesus – or we can choose to ignore God's commands, but in doing the latter we cross the boundary of God's will and purposes for us and reap the consequences. But the story of Achan's sin is more complex than this for in choosing to act outside of God's instructions he not only brought disaster on himself and his family but on the whole people of God.

Self centeredness

One man sinned and many suffered! There is much truth in the saying that 'no one person is an island,' – nearly everything we do or don't do has implications for others much of which we seldom glimpse. In an ever shrinking world the way we boil a kettle or switch a light on affects others. This is true in the Church – we are not just a collection of private individuals who choose what to do or not to do irrespective of others, we are called together to be a body, the body of Christ. We are called together to love and serve one another. What we say or don't say, do or don't do, will profoundly affect the health of the body of Christ. Speaking or acting out of self interest and self centeredness will impair the effectiveness of the Church.

Fearfulness

The defeat at Ai is a story of fear - read 7:3-5 –'the hearts of the people melted like water.' Like a rabbit caught in the headlights, fear of the unknown, of the future, of defeat, of failure, of change, can paralyse! This can be true in the life of a church community especially when a church suffers setbacks. Such a fear can prevent us from moving on in God's will and purposes for our lives and for the life of our Church.

Doubt

Joshua of all people began to doubt God's plans and purposes 7:7-9. If only we had stayed on the other side of the Jordan! Doubt can be a healthy factor in raising good questions which tests faith but when doubts foster self pity and begin to sow the seeds of cynicism, bitterness, and distrust of God then we need to urgently heed God's call to "Stand up" v10, acknowledge our sin v11, and consecrate ourselves v13.

The painful revelation of Achan's sin was necessary if the people of God were to move on, have the victory, take the land and enter into all that God had in store for them. What was true for them then is true for us today as we seek to be God's people for our day and age – our sin and failures, the 'sucker punch' can also be the opportunity for God to do a new and greater work in and through us. The forgiveness of God, through the saving love of Christ is the greatest of all gifts we have as the people of God and when we acknowledge and confess our sin – our disobedience, self centeredness, fear and doubt - we can be confident that God will act in a new way as he leads us into his plans and purposes.



Witness: questions to discuss

This section over this term will give more opportunity for a prayerful reflective response to our Word section. At the next meeting of Small Group Leaders on Nov 10th there will be further opportunity for group leaders to share together and pray into all God is saying to us as a Church Family

1. In the light of the passage spend some time once again prayerfully considering one of the pictures that emerged from the PCC Away Day of a river flowing but impeded by a dam of twigs and branches.
2. What do you think are the key areas that hold back the life and growth of the church? What do you think may hold the river back at St Paul's?
3. Spend some time in prayer and confession

For further thought: How does believing in a God of love who gives the freedom of choice to respond to him or not, match up in a world in where there seems to be little freedom and little choice for the majority who live in poverty and with injustice?