

I. Introduction

- A. Today we're coming back to the book of Joshua. In case you don't know, one of the things we do is to open the Bible together and see what it says. And part of that is going through books of the Bible, one section at a time. That way we can see the extended thoughts from the Bible.
- B. We've been doing that with this book of Joshua. And the series is called **BIRTHRIGHT: IT'S YOURS, TAKE IT BACK**. This is week number 12 in this series. We've taken some breaks, but don't worry; we'll keep coming back to this series until we're done.
- C. If you've missed the beginning, that's okay. I'm going to do all the catching up you need, and I'll do my best to make that painless.

II. When Dreams Die

- A. Today I want to talk to you about what to do when your dreams die. Sometimes dreams die. Sometimes God lets you down, you think. Sometimes you let God down, and you let yourself down.
- B. Maybe you had some really sweet dreams for your life, dreams for your marriage, your family, your career, your finances, the house you would live in, the car you would drive, the generosity you would be able to pour into God's kingdom with your wealth.
- C. You had huge dreams, but somewhere they broke down. Your reality stops short of the dream.
- D. Sometimes dreams die, and that's what I want to talk about today.
- E. And that's where Joshua provides our case study. But actually, the dream goes back before Joshua; almost 500 years back to the days of Moses.

III. The Promised Land Dream

- A. Here's the dream that Moses told his people:
 1. *"The LORD your God will soon bring you into the land He swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land filled with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. 11 The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant" (Deuteronomy 6:10, 11, NLT).*
- B. This is their dream, the Promised Land. God gave the dream in the days of Abraham. And God nurtured the dream for almost 500 years, till the day of Moses and Joshua. God said, I will bring you to this place where you will shine. I will bring you to this place where you will be doing the thing I created you to be.
- C. We've been away from this story for a little while, so let me break down the Promised Land into a concept that's relevant for today.
- D. The Promised Land is the place in your life where:
 1. You experience maximum grace from God, and
 2. God receives maximum glory from you.
- E. That's the dream. That's the sweet spot for your life.
 1. Maybe you dream about a happy marriage and healthy children.
 2. Maybe you dream about a business that creates good quality products and creates good jobs for hard working people.
 3. Maybe you dream about a college degree, or a graduate degree, and the doors that will open for you and the sense of validation and success.
 4. Some of you dream of having the kind of father you always craved and never had—of having someone fill that void in your life.
 5. Maybe God planted it in your heart to be a musician or an artist or an architect or designer, and you want to create beauty to surround people's lives.
 6. Or you might dream of a ministry to touch all kinds of people with the love of God.
 7. Maybe your dream involves athletics or hair styling or agriculture or microscopes or missionary work or teaching or puppies or asphalt—I don't know.
- F. Your dream is different from my dream. Your promised land will look different from my promised land. But all our promised lands have the same 2 qualities in common: you experience maximum grace from God; God receives maximum glory from you.
- G. So here, God's people have this dream. They nurture it for half a millennium.
- H. And then, **IT HAPPENS**. In the days of Joshua, it actually happens. God's people enter the Promised Land. This is their dream come true.
- I. And God does miracle after miracle to make it happen. He parts the Jordan River. He makes the walls of Jericho fall down flat.
- J. They are finally stepping into the life of their dreams, but then stuff starts going wrong. Hold on we'll come back to that.
- K. I want to talk about you for a minute.

IV. God the Dreamer

- A. I believe that God has planted some dreams in every one of us. God has big dreams and we're made in his image. He imagined the world and spoke it into existence, and sustains it by His hand. He imagines the future world, where good has triumphed over evil once for all. God's a dreamer.

- B. And His dreams include you. He imagines YOU and the incredible contribution you can make to his plan. God has big dreams for your life.
 - C. When He created you in His own image, God implanted your piece of his dream into your life. It's part of your hard wiring; part of your operating system. You have idealistic aspirations of what your life can be and do and contribute to the world for Jesus' sake. You have a dream.
 - D. Or you had a dream, until your dream died.
- V. The death of a dream
- A. Imagine how the Jews felt when their dream died.
 - B. See, we're in Joshua 8 today. But last time we looked at Joshua 7. And what's happening is that the Jews take possession of the Promised Land one city at a time.
 - C. City number one: Jericho. Huge miracle. Huge victory. High fives all around.
 - D. City number two: Ai. That's what's in chapter 7. Was that a victory? No. It was a humiliating defeat of a city they should have easily beaten.
 - E. So imagine what a shock to the system that defeat was. Here they are, riding high on the miracle when they crossed the Jordan. Riding high on that great day when they circumcised all the males of Israel and maybe you remember on that weekend, we baptized 350 people in our church!
 - F. And they're all excited and pumped. God is keeping His promises. God is making our dreams come true.
 - G. And then they march around Jericho, and the walls fall down.
 - H. And they're more excited and pumped. God is keeping His promises. God is making our dreams come true.
 - I. And then they turn their sights on city number two and they get crushed. They lose the battle for Ai. And they don't know why. And all of a sudden, they don't know what to think.
 - J. Maybe God gave up on me. Maybe God got tired of fixing the stuff I've broken. Maybe God doesn't keep His promises. Maybe God is ticked off at me. Lord knows I've given him plenty of reasons to be. Maybe we're in the middle of this massive project called Operation Promised Land and now it seems that God has just dropped us.
 - K. Then the dream dies.
 - L. The marriage dies. The dating relationship fizzles. The ministry falls apart. The business fails. The kids turn against you. The economy eats up your money. The pregnancy doesn't happen. The job offer falls through.
 - M. The dream dies.
 - N. It's one of the saddest chapters in a person's life when a dream dies.
 - O. Do you know anybody like that?
 - P. They've given up on the dream. They go through the motions. They enter survival mode. They just get by. There's a sadness to them.
 - Q. And here's the hardest part: when you lose your dream, you lose the biggest point of contact between yourself and God.
 - R. It's like pulling the plug out of the wall. The juice can't flow. The circuit is broken.
 - S. Then what?
 - T. One word—**COMEBACK**.

VI. COMEBACK

- A. When dreams die, it's time for a comeback.
 1. *Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid or discouraged. Take the entire army and attack Ai, for I have given to you the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. 2 You will destroy them as you destroyed Jericho and its king. But this time you may keep the captured goods and the cattle for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city" (Joshua 8:1, 2, NLT).*
- B. Look at this: God takes them right back to their place of defeat and says, try it again.
- C. Here's the question: can the place of past defeat become a place of future victory? Do you get a second chance with God? Once you fail, do you have to suffer the consequences forever?
- D. Here's the good news:
 1. As long as you draw breath, it is never too late in the kingdom of God to make a Spiritual comeback.
- E. It is not God's will that past defeats haunt you for the rest of your life.
- F. Here are three secrets of making a comeback.

VII. Comeback

- A. Take responsibility
 1. The first step in making a comeback is taking responsibility of your own failures. You have to fully own your contribution to the death of your vision. So that's what happens in Joshua 7:19:
 - a) *19 Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, by telling the truth. Make your confession and tell me what you have done. Don't hide it from me." 20 Achan replied, "I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel" (Joshua 7:19, 20, NLT).*
 2. Principle: You are never ready to make a comeback until you take full responsibility for your sins.
 3. Sometimes your dream fails because you did something stupid. Like this guy Achan. He was a soldier in the battle for Jericho. He was under orders to not take any spoils of war. That order came straight from God. Take no spoils of war.
 4. Achan disobeyed. He took silver and gold from Jericho and hid it in his tent.

5. There was sin in the camp, and in the next chapter, his armies suffer a defeat.
 6. I have a word from God for you today; and I know it's a word from the Lord, because it's biblical. You can't experience a God-blessed life if you embrace a God-dishonoring lifestyle.
 7. I had a good friend who had everything going for him. Great job. Lots of money. Really fit, muscular guy. Athletic. Knew how to make all the right Christian sounds.
 8. He looked great on the outside, but he was hollow. And he blamed God. How come I'm so unhappy?
 9. We talked and he admitted he was hopping in the sack with every girl he dated.
 10. You can't experience a God-blessed life if you embrace a God-dishonoring lifestyle.
 11. Sometimes, your vision dies because you're doing dumb stuff.
 - a) Maybe you're living in sexual sin, like my friend was.
 - b) Or financial dishonesty.
 - c) Or you're dating people God doesn't want you to date.
 - d) Or you've abandoned your wife and kids, even though you go thru the motions of being a dad.
 12. I don't know, but be really honest. Ask yourself what you did to help make your dream die.
 13. You've got to let that stuff go.
 14. And then own it. Confess it. There is no such thing as a point of no return with God. If you're alive, there's hope.
 - a) *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9, NKJV).*
 15. No matter how stupid your choices have been, God can forgive you because Jesus already paid in full for all your sins.
 16. I'm just saying you know you're ready for a spiritual comeback when you take responsibility for spiritual defeat, and quit blaming God and the world for your failure.
- B. Pass the test you failed last time.
1. Are there any pole-vaulters here?
 2. Last week I was in Dallas with some other pastors, and it was super encouraging and fun and a shot in the arm for me. One of the pastors has a daughter who's a pole vaulter in college and she was some kind of national champion pole-vaulter. Then one of the other pastors spoke up and talked about being a pole vaulter too.
 3. You know, if you're able to run as fast as you can down a narrow lane with a giant pole in your hands, and then without slowing down, plant that pole into a box, and let it whip you up in the air over a bar so you can fall 15' to earth, and I mean this in a good way, and I'm only quoting the pastor pole vaulter, but if you can do that, you're a freak of nature. In Christian love.
 4. The one pastor told of being at a practice, and his daughter did her pole vault, and in the middle of the vault, her pole snapped in half. She went flying off to the side, and missed the cushion they land on. She hit the ground hard, and had the wind knocked out of her.
 5. The pastor said the coach ran up to his daughter, and helped her up, and said, "Do it again, right now."
 6. And she did.
 7. I think that's what God was doing in chapter 8:
 - a) *Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid or discouraged. Take the entire army and attack Ai, for I have given to you the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. 2 You will destroy them as you destroyed Jericho and its king. But this time you may keep the captured goods and the cattle for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city" (Joshua 8:1, 2, NLT).*
 8. Do it again.
 9. One of my personal dreams is being an author, and you probably know I have one book out in the lobby if you want to pick it up.
 - a) I had 5 rejections before that book got picked up, and one of the rejections said the author was too flippant. Ouch.
 10. Book 2 has been a whole lot harder.
 - a) Remember when we did *Living Large with Other People's Craziess and Esther*? That book has been rejected 8 times by 8 publishers.
 - b) And remember when we talked about the *Royal Palace of the Soul*, and *How to Recession Proof Your Inner World*? That manuscript hasn't been rejected at all, because there weren't any publishers that would even bother to look at it.
 - c) And Remember when we did *Four Letter Words*? And I talked about touchy ideas in an ultra-tolerant world? That book was accepted, and then rejected by my original publisher and has now been rejected 10 times. Though, it's going back for another shot with another publisher. I made a lot of changes, and really, they were really good suggestions.
 11. Here's what I'm saying.
 12. Wherever you felt your biggest defeat, go do it again. Take the test again. Write the proposal again. Pick up the graphite pole, and try again.
 13. Because the place of your greatest defeat can become the place of your greatest victory.

14. Every dream that's worth anything has an Ai where everything falls apart.
15. And that is exactly where God will ask you the same question over and over again: do you trust me enough to try again?
16. There is no force on earth that kills more dreams than unbelief.
 - a) Do you believe God can restore your marriage?
 - b) Do you believe God has an excellent person for you to marry?
 - c) Do you believe God will supply your financial needs?
 - d) Do you believe God can use you, even after you have failed?
17. He can, and he will.
18. But he's going to make you take the same test, over and over and over and over and over and over—until you pass it.
19. What does that mean? It means going through a tough spot with a good attitude. That's how you pass the test. That's all it takes, a good attitude toward God and others.
20. Your job is faith.
21. God's job is outcomes.
22. But why does God keep making you take the same test?
23. Is God stubborn? Yes. Yes he is. Because the tough times in your life expand your soul's capacity for grace. When you pass them, God boosts you up to new levels of grace. New capacities you never had before.
24. God has plans for your life that are greater than you imagine.
25. He is preparing you now for an incredible future. The tests of today toughen you up for the mission assignments of tomorrow.
26. But you say I don't want tougher missions! Yes you do, because...
27. ...the tougher the mission, the greater the joy, the greater the grace, the greater the eternal reward, the greater the glory. What do you want with your life? Do you want to be a little bump on a log, a spiritual nobody waiting for the final benediction?
28. God is preparing you for fantastic accomplishments ahead. Let him. Don't whine about it. Pass the test and move on. Advance! Don't let anything from your past keep whipping you.
29. If you notice that you keep facing the same problem over and over again, consider it an invitation from God to advance to a higher level of grace. Pass the test. Do it with dignity and poise and grace.
30. I know you can do it, because God promised to help you.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. I don't know what struggle you face today. I don't know what failures cause you embarrassment and shame. In fact, I don't even know exactly why God had me preach this sermon today; it's been a struggle all week long.
- B. But I have to believe that someone here today is ready to make a spiritual comeback.
- C. Is that you?
 1. Is your dream dying?
 2. Is God an absentee Father?
 3. Has life defeated you?
- D. That dream is part of your birthright! It's yours, take it back.
- E. Will you make today the first day of your Comeback?
- F. But it seems so difficult. And you wonder if God will take you back, and if you can ever get over the hump. You may even doubt if God wants you back. He does. Without fanfare. Without self-punishment. Without groveling. Without you trying to add one bit to what Christ accomplished when He paid for your sins.
- G. Just come back to God tonight. You can tell him so. You can tell him that you're a prodigal child coming home. You do that, and God throws a feast. He doesn't scold. He doesn't punish. He takes you back, heals you, forgives you, and sets you back squarely on his grace.
- H. But I have to give you two disclosures:
 1. You have to let go of the stuff that is holding you back. You have to let go of Achan's gold and anything in your life that dishonors God or your comeback will falter.
 2. When you make your comeback, God's going to give you the same test you just failed. You have to retake the test.
- I. This time, pass it.
- J. No matter how bad your loss, no matter how embarrassing your past, you can make a Comeback. In the kingdom of God, if you're still breathing, it's never too late. It is not God's will that past defeats haunt you for the rest of your life. Why not make today the day you begin a spiritual comeback that will be legendary in the annals of eternity.
- K. And I'd like us to pray, and I want to give you an opportunity to do that.