

The Inherent Danger of Momentum

- I. When I became a believer in Jesus at the age of 16, I deeply wanted to follow Jesus well. Because of this, I read my Bible constantly. I wanted to know everything God had to say to me. I also sought out anyone who I thought could give me guidance and counsel; pastors, youth pastors, any more mature fellow believer that would give me the time of day.
 - A. My quest to know God made a great leap forward one day when a friend gave me about 15 Christian books of various teachings and genres. I became a reader that day, and have never ceased.
 - B. "Visit many good books, but live in the Bible." C.H. Spurgeon
 1. The first book that I read out of that stack was one by Donald Campbell entitled "No Time for Neutrality". It was a devotional book about how the sixth book in the Bible, Joshua, was a great roadmap for the Christian life.
 2. Dr. Campbell was a president of Dallas Theological Seminary, but I am very grateful for his ability to transform an Old Testament book, full of Bible stories into a series of lessons that helped a teenager learn to follow Jesus.
 - C. This book instilled in me a love for the book of Joshua that has never subsided. I wish that I had a whole day to take you on a tour of this amazing book.
 1. If I had more time, I would like to tell you how Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the children of Israel. He was chosen by God to bring God's people into the Land of promise after Moses had disobeyed God.
 2. I would love to explain how Joshua was a type of Christ, in that he secured the promise for God's people, after Moses, who represented the law, couldn't bring them across the river into their inheritance.
 - a) Moses was a lawgiver and instructor, but Joshua was a deliverer! In fact, Joshua's name means, "Yahweh is Generous" and "Yahweh Saves". He represents Jesus, because God's generosity, and his saving power are never seen more clearly than they are in Christ!
 - (1) **Romans 8:32 ESV** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him **graciously give us all things?** "Yahweh is Generous!"
 - (2) **Hebrews 7:25 ESV** Consequently, he is able to **save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him (Christ), since he always lives to make intercession for them.** "Yahweh Saves!"
 - b) Even cooler, Joshua's Hebrew name is "Yeshua". Anyone know what the Hebrew pronunciation of Jesus' name is? That's right! Yeshua! Joshua, Yeshua, Jesus - they are all different versions of the same name.
 - D. If I had time to take you through the contents of the book of Joshua, I would tell you how it begins with Moses, the leader of the people for 40 years, now dead. But God promising is to go with Joshua as he now leads the people; commanding him not to be afraid, and to dedicate himself to constant meditation on his written word.
 1. I would remind you how, Joshua, who 40 years previous had been sent by Moses to spy out the promised land, sends two men to spy out Jericho, the first city Israel will attack.

- a) I would tell you how, once in Jericho, they are hidden by a prostitute named Rahab. In exchange for hiding them, they promise to spare the lives of Rahab and her family when they attack the city.
 - b) I would tell you how Rahab is accepted into the people of God, regardless of her checkered past, as a tangible witness to the grace of God. I would tell you of how she became the great, great, great, great grandmother of the Lord Jesus! (Look it up in the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1:5!)
- E. I would tell you how that when the time came to enter the land, God stopped the flow of the Jordan River during the time of its annual flood, causing the water to stand up in a heap, so that up to three million Israelites could walk in on dry land, which was symbolic of Christian baptism.
 - 1. I would tell you how that as they were crossing the Jordan, leaders of each tribe gathered stones to set up an altar as a lasting memorial to God's faithfulness to them.
 - 2. I would tell you how they also set up an altar right in the middle of the Jordan to mark where the miracle had occurred. Both of these altars show us the importance of always pointing out the Lord's goodness to our children.
- F. I would tell you how in chapter 5, the people reinstated the covenant of circumcision, which had been neglected during their 40 year trek through the desert.
 - 1. This symbolized the putting off of the flesh and the surrender to holiness, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.
 - 2. I would tell you how they also celebrated the passover, which was to commemorate God's ability to save, redeem, and deliver his people.
- G. I would tell you how the "Captain of the Lord's host" met Joshua outside of Jericho. Most scholars believe this mysterious character was an Old Testament appearance of Christ himself - called a "Christophany". He made it clear that **he** (not Joshua) was in charge, and that his presence made the very ground where they were standing holy.
- II. Next, I would tell you that when it was finally time to attack Jericho, the people received specific instructions from the Lord. He told them to march around the city once a day for 6 days, but on the seventh day they were to march around it 7 times.
 - A. I would love to tell you how that on the 7th day, when the priests marching before the ark of the covenant blew their trumpets of Ram's horns, all the people shouted with a great shout and the walls of the city fell down flat!
 - 1. I would tell you how the armed men of Israel rushed up on the toppled walls and into the doomed city and killed every living thing in the city; man, woman, child and beast except for Rahab and her family who had entered into covenant with God.
 - 2. I would mention how the people were forbidden by God to take any of the spoils for themselves. Everything they found in the city was to be devoted to destruction, as a symbol of a Holy God's refusal to compromise with, or cherish anything stained by sin.
 - B. I would further tell you of how the destruction of the city, and the annihilation of its inhabitants was to be so thorough that Joshua pronounced a chilling curse on

anyone who would dare try rebuild the city after God had delivered such a decisive blow to it.

- III. I would love to tell you about all these things, but I won't this morning. Aren't you glad I didn't? Instead I want to focus in the events of chapter 7, which take place immediately after the fall of Jericho.
- A. Don't forget everything that has transpired in Israel's immediate past: after 40 years of tedious wandering in the desert, Moses dies and God raises up Joshua and empowers him and the people. He promises his presence. He commands Joshua and the people to stay intimately connected to his word.
 - B. **Deuteronomy 8:3 ESV** And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, **that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.** (See also Matt. 4:4)
 - C. Then, by simply obeying God and marching, blowing trumpets, and shouting, God gives them the first city in their campaign against the people of Canaan!
 - 1. Can you imagine somebody suggesting this strategy to the Joint Chiefs in order to defeat ISIS?!
 - 2. God has told them that if they will just listen to his instructions, and obey them fully, that he will never fail to show up and support his people.
 - D. And that's exactly what God did! And this resulted in Israel being in an amazing state that we all, without exception, enjoy when we find ourselves there. It was a state of unparalleled **momentum**.
 - 1. Everything was going their way! What terms can you imagine them using to describe what was happening? "We've entered the glory days! We're experiencing revival! We're blessed! We're favored!"
 - 2. Momentum makes you feel like, in the words of Ethel Merman, "everything's coming up roses!" When I was in sales, if I closed a deal in the morning, I felt 10 feet tall and bulletproof for the rest of the day. But if I was in a slump, I felt like the sun would never shine again. That's the deceptive nature of momentum.
- IV. **Joshua 7:1 ESV** But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. **2** Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. **3** And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not have all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are few." **4** So about three thousand men went up there from the people. And they fled before the men of Ai, **5** and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six of their men and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water.
- A. So after Jericho, God's people are so high on the fumes of success, that they forget **why** they were succeeding. A pollutant has entered the camp of Israel in the form of one man's disobedience, and no one notices.
 - 1. Now, you may feel that I'm being too critical. How could they have possibly known what one rebel has done to jeopardize their mission? How can that

possibly have been avoided? God seems a little to be a little harsh with the “good guys”! What about the thousands of warriors that obeyed?

2. Well let’s look at their history again...
 - a) In chapter 3, God tells them how to enter the promised land. They listened and obeyed, and God stops the Jordan from flowing so they can cross.
 - b) In chapter 4, God told them to set up a memorial altar and they listened and obeyed, and had something to point their children to as a reminder of God’s goodness and faithfulness.
 - c) In chapter 5, God told them to renew the covenant through circumcision and the passover. They listened and obeyed, and by the end of the chapter, Jesus himself shows up to take charge of the military campaign.
 - d) In chapter 6, God gives them exact orders for the battle of Jericho, they listened and obeyed, and God knocks the enemy’s wall down flat!
- B. Do you see a pattern here? Israel listens to God. Israel obeys God. God comes through in major league ways. But when Israel is swept up in the emotional and spiritual intoxication of **momentum**, a man sins against God, and no one is aware, even when it costs them their second battle!
 1. But even when they were preparing for the battle, when was the prayer meeting? Where was their dependence? The inquiring of the Lord? They looked at the city of Ai through very pragmatic lenses, which is a dangerous side effect of momentum. “It’s a tiny little city. Certainly not a problem for such a favored people as we are! No need to roll out the whole army for these pip-squeaks!”
 2. Don’t you think there’s a very good chance that if they had slowed down and asked the Lord, “What’s next, Lord?” that he would have shown them the poison of sin that had entered their ranks before 36 men had to die?
- C. **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. **7** And Joshua said, “Alas, O Lord God, **why have you** brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! **8** O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! **9** For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?”
 1. Do you see how Joshua responds to this defeat? He views the fact that they got their butts kicked as a problem with God! As though God had left his people; when, in fact, exactly the opposite had happened.
 2. But God tells him that it’s not time to pray; it’s time to take corrective action in the form of corporate repentance and discipline.
 3. **Joshua 7:10 ESV** The Lord said to Joshua, “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? **11** Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. **12** 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.

13 Get up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, "There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you."

- V. Now why am I saying all of this to you today? Because our church, like Israel of old, is experiencing a time of great momentum. The favor we are experiencing is a very good thing, and no reasonable person who has seen what has happened here over the last several weeks could doubt God's delivering hand in all of it.
 - A. But what has happened was the result of literally years of faith, trust and confidence in the goodness of the Lord. We didn't just stumble into this. Many saints have prayed many prayers for God to deliver us over the years.
 - 1. Years ago, we adopted Psalm 20:7 as the word of the Lord to us, "Some trust in chariots; some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."
 - 2. But now that there is no debt; now that we have less fear of how to pay the bills; now that we feel the euphoria of momentum, can we still trust only in the Name of the Lord our God for our salvation?
 - B. And how will we demonstrate that trust? What will we trust him for? Will we be satisfied to be out of debt, and to have a building that is paid off and easier to maintain, or will we, like Peter, ask Jesus to call us out of our safe little boat so that we can experience the sheer thrill and the abject terror of simply trusting him even when the waves are crashing all around us?
 - 1. Will our vision now be manageable, safe and devoid of all risk; or do we want to be in a place where God accomplish bigger things than we have ever in our history dared to dream about?
 - 2. Will we constantly be found on our faces to receive the direction of the Lord, willing to move only when we hear his voice, or will we gravitate to a "church as usual" mentality?
 - C. And when God reveals there is sin or corruption among us, will we manage it or ignore it? Or will we quickly repent of our own ungodliness, and welcome participation in a participation in a growing community of love, service, and mutual accountability?
- VI. Achan, the man that took some of the things devoted to destruction was punished severely for his crime (you can read about it in Joshua 7). But the whole nation repented for the sin of presumption that had cost them so dearly.
 - A. And the way they repented was by returning to listening and obeying. In Joshua 8, God gives the people very specific instructions on how to defeat the pesky little city of Ai. The people obey his commands, and they win a great victory. Oh, and God let them keep the spoils of their victory!
 - B. What is the message for City View / North Ridge Life church? Simply this, that Salvation belongs to the Lord! Horses, chariots, gifted preachers, huge budgets, and slick programs cannot save us. Salvation belongs to our God!
 - 1. Will we live by the bread of this world? Or of our best thinking? Or of our concerted efforts? Or will we live by every Word that comes from God's mouth?
 - 2. Let's not be deceived by momentum. Let's commit ourselves to seeking the Lord!