

Joshua 8

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 October 2026

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we confess before you that we have a problem in that we often forget the beautiful, true, good promises you make to your people. And we often forget them and live as if you haven't made promises to us. And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would continually bring us back to your Word, that we might know and hear and remember and live by these very precious promises. We also know, Father, that we forget the warnings in your Word. And Father, we confess we probably forget your warnings more than we forget your promises. And so we ask, Father, that you also help us to remember your warnings and to live our lives accordingly. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Saviour. Amen. Please be seated.

Amen. So I have to ask your indulgence as an older man. For some of you younger people will just think that's just sort of weird, George, that this has finally happened to you, or you think it's a bit surprising. But I am sufficiently old. I mean, I still find it really weird. I can't say the word S-O-R-R-Y because it sounds like S-I-R-I to my watch, and my watch talks to me, which I just think is really weird every time it happens. I now even have to spell the word so I don't end up having to tell S-I-R-I to shut up. I'm not looking forward to the day when S-I-R-I learns how to spell S-I-R-I, and then I don't know what I'll have to do. I'll have to make up some other word. But my wife was out for her walk, and I was making supper, and my kids set up a thing for Louise and me, and it's a little screen, and it's right between where we wash dishes and where we cook, and where we, you know, chop up the vegetables and stuff like that, prepare the meal. And it's a little screen there, and it shows us pictures of our kids and grandkids and other things, which is really precious. And it also allows me to talk to it, and I can ask Google to play songs. So that's what I like to do when I'm washing dishes or cooking. And so a couple of weeks ago, my wife was off for an exercise walk, and I'm cooking, and I kept asking Google to play a song, and it kept picking the wrong song. And not just like tiny bit wrong, like nothing in the title of the song or the artist even remotely matched anything I asked. So this had happened three or four times in a row, and I got frustrated.

[3:55] I was kneeling down trying to find something in the, you know, there's some vegetables at the bottom of the fridge, and I said out loud, Google, you're doing a terrible job. And to my surprise, the algorithm answered me. That's the shocking thing for an old guy like me. All of a sudden, it said to me, I'm very sorry to hear that.

What? What would you like me to do? And I'd say, well, I'd like you to, you know, I'm sorry. He said, I'm very sorry to hear that. What am I doing wrong? But the algorithm's talking to me. So I said, well, you keep choosing the wrong songs that I asked for. And then the algorithm says to me, well, I'm sorry to hear that. Do you want me to report it? So I said, yes. Now, just for the record, it didn't fix it.

It still kept giving me the wrong songs. At least, you know, intermittently, I'll still ask for a Phil Wickham song, and it'll play, I don't know, Forrest Frank, or something like that, or something not even Phil Wickham, Forrest Frank, like that doesn't even go together. Anyway, I mention all of this because I've gathered that lots of people talk to algorithms. I mean, that's what, when I look at things on YouTube or newspapers, people talk to AI, right? And it's even been implicated in the, in some suicides and some other types of things, the conversations that people have with algorithms, with machines.

And, and on one hand, so that's sort of like, I think not very wise. But the other thing is, of course, is that a lot of people sort of see AI as sort of like talking to God. So me talking to my little tiny plastic screen, sort of right where I cut the vegetables between the stove and the dish rack and the sink, is just like talking to God. And in fact, many people would say it's actually better to talk to AI than it is to talk to God, because at least AI might occasionally answer you, and there's a physical object. And then many other people would say that, you know, it's just, you know, it's just like nothing, like prayer is like nothing. And maybe you might as well do AI as something else.

Well, the text we're going to look at today is, on one hand, at the, at the front facing aspect of the text, it has some very horrible things, which mean that we feel uncomfortable reading it. But if you press through the uncomfortable things, the shocking things, you see that amongst other things, it has very profound things to say about prayer, and very profound things to say about belonging.

[6:25] And, and, and with belonging, of course, things like identity. So it would be a great help for me if you would turn in your Bibles to Joshua chapter eight, which is the text we're looking at. We're preaching through the book of Joshua. But it's a big book, we're not going to cover everything, and this story has 35 verses, I'm not going to read all of them. But it's good to have your Bibles in front of you, because I don't want to avoid difficult things. But I'll, I'll read parts, tell parts, and then read part. And, and here's, here's what it says. And the context is, Joshua is the sixth book written in the Bible, and it's talking about events set in the, around the year 1400.

And it's describing how the people of Israel entered into the promised land, and took the promised land as their own. And I know this, I haven't said anything about this in a while. But it's really quite remarkable that there has been an enduring presence of the Jewish people in that piece of land ever since 1400 BC. I should have said 1400 BC, that there's been enduring presence of the Jewish people, even if they haven't had their own state in the land. And it describes the story of how they get into the land, the conquest, and the judgment on the Canaanites. And what's just happened the week before, is like several weeks before, there's been the Jericho, the Jordan River has been stopped by God's command. It's a mighty miracle. The ground has been dried. Joshua leads the people of Israel, or the ark actually leads the people of Israel. God leads the people of Israel into the promised land.

And then a couple of weeks later, there's the Battle of Jericho, and the walls come tumbling down a second very gobsmacking, what the heck, whoa miracle that happens in a short period of time that everybody knows about, because they're public miracles, not private, not alleged miracles or visions, but public ones, which causes a massive reaction throughout the entire region of the Canaanite people.

And then they go to attack a smaller city called AI. And I didn't, it actually, that's how you're supposed to pronounce it, AI, believe it or not. So this is all about the defeat of AI.

You charismatic types can take it as a prophecy that the Jewish people are going to defeat AI sometime. I don't know. That's up to you. I'm making no comments about it. But they go to defeat, to fight AI, and they get defeated by AI. And it turns out that there was a rebellion against Israel about it. And that's what we looked at last week. And now the rebellion has been dealt with.

[9:04] People have recommitted themselves to the Lord. And now the story continues. What's going to happen now? Has there been a change of heart in AI? Have people come to join AI? What's going on? And here's how the story continues. And the first two verses, in some ways, describes, if you're doing this as a Netflix thing or an Amazon Prime thing or one of the Paramount or Apple, or I don't want to, I'm not giving any preferential treatment, but it might be that this part begins with an elderly Joshua at the end of his life with a gravelly, deep voice, recounting the things that happened around this time when we were all young or something like that. It gives us sort of the summary of the whole story, the key bits of the story. And here's what it says. And the Lord said to Joshua, do not fear and do not be dismayed. I'm just going to pause here for a second. It's really interesting. If you ever want to do an interesting study with a concordance, that's where you can

look up words in the Bible. And if you look up the word fear, it's very interesting. A lot of them will deal with the fear of the Lord, which is a whole other topic. But a lot of the times, especially in the Gospels, maybe just look the word fear up in the New Testament. It's amazing how often Jesus and other people in the Bible come to people and say, don't be afraid. Like it's a very, very common thing for Jesus to say, don't be afraid. And this is a really important and precious thing for you and I to know, is that the Lord knows that we often have lots of fears. And he doesn't say, smarten up, you know, come on, whack us in the side of the head, kick us in the butt, you know, tell us to grow up, you know, all that other type of stuff that we might type of do. It doesn't say, you know, you're a terrible Christian because you're afraid, you should be ashamed of yourself. Nothing like that happens. He knows our condition. He knows my weakness. He knows your weakness. And he doesn't respond to it by shaming us. Or, yeah, he doesn't respond by shaming us or telling us off. He says, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. And in the context here, why should they not be afraid?

Because the Lord is with them. I'm with you. That really hard thing that you have to deal with, that, you know, the credit counselor you need to see tomorrow or the person who has the loan or whatever it is, I'm going to be there with you when you do that. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Go back and read verse 1 again. 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 and his city and his land. And some of you might go, oh my, I have given into your hand the king of Ai and his people and his city and his land.

I'll talk about this in a moment. And you shall do to Ai and its king as he did to Jericho and its king, which was he died. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. And then he tells them how to fight the battle. Lay an ambush against the city behind it. Now, there's lots of woes going on. Whoa, like what's going on here? And one of the woes I talked about a couple of weeks ago, but I think it's appropriate to come back to it again. Like, you might very well say, okay, George, like, whoa, the Lord says to the Israelite people, the Jewish people, I have given the king to you. I have given you the people. I have given you the city.

[12:48] I have given you the land. Like, George, that's just so wrong on so many levels. I don't even know where to begin. Now, here's one of these things where the thing, this is one of the reasons I'm doing the book of Joshua, because it's at the front line of people making complaints about the Christian faith. And so we get nervous about reading it, or we skip over it quickly. But it's when we press into those complaints that we see the precious truths and why we need them, ironically. And so there's a real couple of very precious truths in this type of very obvious woe.

So the first thing is, of course, that the Bible is far more realistic than we are, and that we are fundamentally confused. Well, why is that? Well, first of all, this sentence implies that the king of Ai belongs to the Lord, the people belong to the Lord, the city belongs to the Lord, and the land belongs to the Lord. And this, of course, is something highly contentious, and most people would find threatening, and most people would reject, and don't like. Well, but let's, let's just pause for a second. On one hand, we can understand that.

We long for a good belonging. Human beings want to belong in a good way, to good things. And human beings fear being left out. One of the great faux pas that we can sometimes do socially is we maybe come up at coffee hour, and, you know, two women are talking, and we come up to one of the women or one of the men and say, by the way, do you like to go out for coffee with me afterwards? And we ignore the other person.

Don't realize that's, like, a terrible thing to do. Like, either wait till they're separate, or invite both. But to invite one and not the other, and you go, like, what? They don't like me? Like, I didn't shower this morning? Like, like, what's going on? Like, why, why can't I be included?

We fear being left out. And at the same time, we worry about the claims that the state makes on us. The state increasingly acts as if we somehow, human beings, belong to the state. And on other hands, we sort of like that because sometimes we worry that our people are, you know, we can have parents who act as if we still belong to our parents, or brothers and sisters act as if we still belong to the family or to the tribe. And then, of course, we worry about the demands of corporations and now AI and talking algorithms that they might think that somehow or another we belong to them. And on one level, we sort of think and hope and long that we belong to ourselves. And that is only, at best, a quarter truth that we belong to ourselves. And you might say, George, belonging to yourself is the only solution to these things. And enshrining them in laws is the only solution. And teaching kids to understand that they belong to themselves is the only solution. But it

is, at best, a quarter of the solution. Why? Well, think about it for a second. This is where the Bible is far more realistic than we are. How many of us caused ourselves to be born? You put your hands up, it's a sign of mental illness, just for the record. None of you caused yourself to be born. How many, after you caused yourself to be born, cared for yourselves until you were 21? And able to maybe get out and start doing things in the world?

[16:17] Once again, if you put your own hand up, none of you changed your own diapers. Me too, by the way. None of us did that. Like, none of us did that. And then the other thing is, how many of us here will not die? If you put your hand up, once again, that's not a good sign, mentally, for you. Every one of us will die. And when we die, we lose everything, right? Flannery O'Connor has a brilliant title of a very weird book, but worth the effort to read, is that you can't be poorer than dead. You can't be poorer than dead. Second after Bill Gates dies, him and the poorest fentanyl addict on our streets have the exact same amount of money when they both die. So really, if you think about it for a second, like, one moment, you didn't, you didn't, and you didn't create the world, and you don't care for yourself. So it's very hard, if those things are in fact the case, to actually think that you belong to yourself. Like, how do you belong to yourself if you didn't cause yourself to be born, didn't care for yourself, didn't invent the world that sustains you, and that you will die? So what's, what's going on here? You see, the Bible is going to teach us this very profound truth, that ultimately, every single thing that exists belongs to the Lord. And it belongs to the Lord. I belong to the Lord by virtue that on one hand, he is my creator, and secondly, that he sustains me. Existence does not exist in and of itself. It exists because the Lord wills existence into existence every moment, every single moment. He maintains my existence and everything that's required for my existence, so that properly speaking, he truly belongs. He, I truly belong to him. And this is one of the reasons why Augustine very famously said, our hearts are restless until they rest in him. He made us for himself, and our hearts are restless till we rest in him.

And this then brings up a whole lot of other types of things about what's going on in this particular story. That if, in fact, the Lord created everything and sustains everything, and everything belongs to him, then this means that the Canaanites don't actually own themselves, they don't own the land. And it also means that even to do the modern Canadian thing to say, well, you know, for those of us, and by the way, you know, that we live on Turtle Island, and this is stuff that doesn't belong to us, and, well, I mean, does it belong to the people who are here before us, or the people before those people, or the people before those people who are before those people? Like, where does it end? Like, it doesn't really, you know, like, the Bible goes in a completely different direction in all of this, is that everything ultimately belongs to him, and because it belongs to him, he has rights over it, and can do, in a sense, as he wants with it. Give you a bit of a weird example. Let's say one of you heard this sermon this week, and three weeks from now, you happen to be doing a little bit of Googling, and you say, oh, look, there's this mega church pastor in the States with, like, 50,000 people a Sunday, and he's preaching a sermon on Joshua 8. I wonder how George compares to him. And you listen to the sermon, and five minutes in, you go, he just gave an example about AI talking to him, and what?

And then you go through it, and you realize, he's taken my sermon word for word, and copied it for himself. Now, I could sue him, right? I mean, I wouldn't, but, like, you'd be mad, and because it's, why, I mean, ultimately, I would say that the sermon comes from God, but you could say that the sermon ultimately is my sermon, and if he was to steal it, that's what he's doing. If he gives it as if he's done it when he's not done it, and he's stealing it for himself, that's theft, and it's completely and utterly wrong, and we would be upset. I mean, on the other hand, if he began the sermon by saying, by the way, friends, we had to preach on Joshua 8, I was completely flummoxed by it, and the Lord said, why don't you Google some other sermons? And I came across this obscure, tiny, teeny, weenie church in this weird city called Ottawa, in another Canada, up to the north of us, and this sermon was so good, I'm giving you George's sermon, and then you'd all think that's sort of cool. I'd think that was sort of cool. He at least credited it, but here's the thing. See, what the Bible teaches is something far better than us belonging to ourselves. It's a far better thing to understand that you belong to the

Lord, a far, far better thing to understand that you belong to the Lord, and he has made you his steward over yourself. And that twist is why the earlier idea, the longing, the sense that we should belong to ourselves, that's at best a quarter truth. We do need sometimes protection from families, and tribes, and clans, and corporations, and states, and teachers, and pastors, and churches that

can become, I mean, there's this whole movement in certain Protestant circles, I think it's called the New Apostolic Reformation of just mere human beings thinking that they get direct words from God, and can tell people who to marry, and who to, that's abhorrent, completely abhorrent to the Bible, completely abhorrent to the Bible. And it's just pride and narcissism with the odd proof text, and should be completely rejected. Ask me what I really think about it, like I just, in case you're wondering. But we do understand that our secular desire to have some type of sense of self-ownership is a quarter truth. The full truth is that you ultimately belong to the Lord, but he has made you steward over yourself to account for how you act.

[22:12] And, you know, that's, there's a crushing burden if you belong to yourself. I mean, one of the things that the gospel says is, you know, Matthew 11, Matthew chapter 11, 28 to 30, Jesus says, come to me all who are weary and heavy, heavy laden, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. I've mixed up the translate, the memory verse a little bit, but it's a, it is a burden to believe that you belong to yourself.

It's something that crushes you. It might free you for a moment, but it crushes you. And it's, in fact, freedom to know Jesus as Savior and Lord, to be reconnected to your creator and your sustainer, and to know that his yoke will, in fact, as his yoke, his presence, his word comes upon you, that he will bring you into more and more inner freedom, so that you can steward yourself wisely and well, for not only your good, but for the good of the city, the good of your family, the good of your company, the good of your state, and the glory of God, in a way which is good and beautiful. So, at the heart of this story, then, is something which, once again, at first we go, whoa, it smacks at us, but if we press into it, we realize that, in fact, it sounds plausible because it's repeated endlessly, but if you look into it, the nature of our birth and our existence and our death means that we don't really belong to ourselves, but there's a nugget there that, on one hand, the Bible, by bringing these shocking truths to us, it does something, there's this very wise British guy called Daniel Strange, who talks about how the Bible is subversive and fulfilling.

It subverts and fulfills at the same time. It subverts these things that we think, but it fulfills the deeper longing and desire that we have, and if you haven't read anything by Daniel Strange, I think I've read all of his books, and you'll notice, after you've read them, how he's had an influence on how I speak and how I think, but there's another woe in all of that, and the woe comes at the end of verse two. By the way, just so you know, there's 35 verses. I'm spending an equal amount of time on each verse, so this is going to be a six-hour-long sermon. Most of the sermon comes in the first two verses because it basically gives the theme of what goes on in the text. It describes from 2,000 feet in the air, it describes what goes on in the rest of the story, but notice that next thing. Read verse two again, and you shall do to Ai and its king, as you did to Jericho and its king, only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city behind it. Now, this is one of the things which is very unique about this story. I think it's, I don't know if it happens again. It doesn't happen again to this detail. It happens occasionally in other stories in what our Jewish friends called the Tanakh, and Christians called the Old Testament, but what we actually see in the rest of the story is the Lord is the general of the story.

The Lord says to Joshua, this is how you're going to win the battle. I've given it to you, but you're still going to have to fight, and this is what you do. You do an ambush, you do the ambush this way, you wait until this moment, and then when you do wait until this moment, then you do this particular sign, and people see the sign, and then there's a turning around, and he is the one who is the general for the entire story, and this causes a lot of problems.

[25:42] Like, okay, once again, George, you're saying that in this particular case, and George, you really think this actually happened? And I'd say, yes, I think it actually happened. I think it's a true summary of what actually happened. You know, in 35 verses, it's true. And so, George, you think that the Lord actually gives directions for a war that's going to kill all the residents?

Are you saying that you believe in holy war? Well, no. This story is sort of a semi-holy war, but it's not a holy war in the way it's been understood by other religions and sometimes by Christians. This whole thing about the taking of the promised land is, in a sense, a bit of a holy war. It's first and foremost a judgment upon the Canaanite people, and in a couple of weeks, I'm going to finally give a bit of a longer description about what the Canaanite people were like. Just always remember when you're reading the story, these aren't a group of secular Amish, peace-loving, forgiving people. Think child sacrifice, incest, sex trafficking as holy endeavors. Like, just always think that to

realize what's going on. But what it is, is that there's this one time in one place, very specific, where the Lord actually wants the people of Israel to come in to judge the people and for them to take the land. And it's all part of a big theme in the entire Bible, right from the Garden of Eden until the Book of Revelation. One of the big themes is that the Lord wants his people to be in his place, in his presence, under his redeeming rule.

He wants Adam and Eve to be in the garden with his presence, in his presence. He wants them to be his. He wants them to be in that place, and he wants them to be in his presence, and he wants them to be under his rule. I've added the word redeeming because the problem is that Adam and Eve rebelled against God. And so even the whole issue of belonging, part of the reason we're terrified of belonging to the Lord is part of our rebellion against the Lord. For many people, when I say ultimately you belong to the Lord, that's like the most terrifying thing you could possibly say to them, that you belong to God and not to yourself. And that all goes right back to the Garden of Eden.

It helps to show how Genesis 3 is completely and utterly true, psychologically more true than any other holy book that's been written, because other holy books deny this idea of a cosmic but intimate, a transcendent but intimate rebellion against the true God.

But there's this story of the Lord's people in the Lord's place, in the Lord's presence, under the Lord's redeeming rule. This is going to change with the New Testament. If you read the book of Romans, and if you read the New Testament, it's very obvious that the Lord is not finished with the Jewish people. And it in fact has been a miracle that the people of Israel who enter the promised land around the year 1400 BC in 1948 became a nation. And that's been puzzling Christians about how to think it through ever since. For Jewish people, of course, it's been a thing of rejoicing. For others, it's been a source of great conflict and shame. But it is very clear that the New Testament says that the Lord is not finished with the Jewish people. But the same principle of the Lord's people and the Lord's place in the Lord's presence under the Lord's redeeming rule is seen in the New Testament.

[29:29] Everything changes with Jesus. In Matthew chapter 28, God, the Lord, after his resurrection, says to the disciples, go into all the world, every single people group that there is, go to every single people group and tell them about me and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded them.

And that is now the Christian understanding of what is to be. And so we are to understand some of us are from Rwanda. Some of us are from China. Some of us are from Uganda. I'm going to keep, I'm going to stop going right there. But lots and lots of places, Indonesia, Ecuador, all over the world. But we are here in this season, in this place. And we believe that we are here to be here for this season. Maybe the Lord's going to call you to another place in a month or take five years or 10 years. But for this season, you are here. You are to be part of his people in this place, in his presence, under his redeeming rule. And in this place, we share the gospel, seek the good of the city and the good of our nation, and share the gospel so that more and more people will be under his saving rule, in his presence with great joy and full of happiness and blessing. And we are to pray for that day that any people group that does not yet have people, that they will come, there will be a people group where there are the Lord's people from that people group. That is the great message of the Bible. It's still there. And it begins to be brought clarity from what happened after the disaster of the rebellion against

Adam and Eve into this. The other thing about this, this whole thing about lay an ambush against the city behind it. This, what you need to remember always when you're reading the Bible, is that the Bible teaches principles or tasks or abstract truths, like maybe that you should pray about everything.

But on the other hand, if you just have those abstract truths, it's hard for it to really take on flesh in us. We need stories. We need stories and poems and proverbs, but we desperately need stories. We live by stories. And in fact, one of the things about discipleship is the Lord wants to change that little evil bird on your shoulder that says, you're no good. You'll never be good. You're terrible. You're garbage. You're going to fail. You're a loser. Like that type of story in short form. And the Lord wants to change that so that you hear, do not be afraid. You belong to me. I will never leave you or forsake you.

[32:06] I love you. I want to make you loved and lovely. That's part of discipleship is learning to hear the different story. And so what we see in this story is when it says to pray for everything, this actually brings it all together. You see, the fact of the matter is, is that God directly interrupts and deals with nations and corporations and battles. It's one of the things, if you read the Old Testament, it's very, very clear. It's what you see in the book of Revelation. That just because a whole pile of human beings unite themselves under a king doesn't mean that somehow or another the Lord is not still sovereign and Lord over them. And it wouldn't be, is it just because Elon Musk can make a spectacular company or Carney can make particular types of things or Trump can make certain types of claims or Putin or, I can't remember, the head of China, that they could, no, no, nothing, you can all do that if you want. But the Lord is still sovereign and he at times interferes and interrupts the affairs of nations according to his purpose. And so we have this wonderful thing that when we see that the Lord can interfere in how a battle works out, there is a profound encouragement for you and me to pray. Pray big and pray small.

I don't talk about this very often, but I'm going to mention it right now. And if, by the way, I'm, there's, this congregation, there will be people in this congregation who've had abortions or supported abortions. And, um, and I'm not doing a guilt trip on you right now. Um, not, it shouldn't be a surprise to you that Christians who believe the Bible aren't in favor of that. And if you are one who's had an abortion, there is no better place to process that and to be healed than in part of a Christian community and to know how much Jesus loves you and he died for you. But I want to say this, pray big prayers, pray for the end of abortion. If you're like me, it's Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. I don't believe he can stop it, but he can. Pray for the end of abortion and pray for a parking spot on Sunday morning and pray for everything in between.

Because the Lord can change the direction of nations and the directions of battles. Some of you who know history, there are many Christians in the time that thought that the reason the British armed forces did not get obliterated by Hitler at Dunkirk was because God heard the prayer of the British nation and Hitler inexplicably stopped and the soldiers were rescued. There are many who know history who say that it's because of prayer that the U.S. won the Battle of the Midway.

[35:05] And so the terrors of what the Japanese had done at that particular time were turned around and defeated. I'm not saying that's true or not, but I'm saying you pray for big things and you pray for small things.

This puts meat on the bones of those types of things. He might say yes, he might say no, he might say later, but he hears your prayers.

Now, I have to tie up the whole belonging thing and there's other things we need to do in the story. So if you just jump with me, what happens in the rest of the story is, you know, the Lord says do this and do that and there's an ambush and one of the things you discover in the story is that AI is a small city, but Bethel, which is a very, very large city, not that far away, they actually decide to join forces with AI.

And so when AI is defeated, not only is AI defeated, but Bethel is defeated as well, a far larger city. In other words, the response of AI to their partial victory was to do more fighting and the response of other people who knew all about the miracles was to join in and join in the fighting because they think they're going to win.

And that basically goes back and forth. You can read all about the battle if you want. And then actually we'll start reading it at verse 22.

[36:31] And the others came out from the city against them and so they were in the midst of Israel and some on this side and some on that side and Israel struck them down until there was none left, left none that survived or escaped.

And I'm not avoiding talking about this. I'm going to talk about this. This has been an issue on several of the stories. And I'm going to wait for a couple of weeks. I'm going to address this issue of total, apparent, a total annihilation of people.

So you just park it because I am going to deal with it. But I'm not going to deal with it today because there's lots to deal with. Verse 23. But the king of AI they took alive and brought him near to Joshua.

When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of AI in the open wilderness where they pursued them and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to AI and struck it down with the edge of the sword.

And all who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000, all the people of Ai. But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction.

[37 : 39] I will talk about this in a couple of weeks. Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their plunder, according to the word of the Lord that he commanded Joshua. So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever a heap of ruins as it is to this day.

And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening. And at sunset Joshua commanded and they took his body down from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

Now this is a very horrific story. And I am going to talk in a couple of weeks about it. But this week I'm going to talk about something important to keep in mind for all of the other times that we listen to it.

And that is this. The response of Ai in Bethel is not the most reasonable response.

The context is that God has done a gobsmacking, bang your head, shocking two miracles that these people know about.

[38 : 52] He stopped the River Jordan. Stopped it in such a way that was obviously miraculous. Dried the ground. The people of Israel come in. Just by his mere will, the Lord has destroyed the mighty fortress of Jericho, all of the walls, just by his mere will.

And this is completely and utterly, as we're going to see in a moment, widely known throughout the Canaanite people, city-states. And why is it that their response to this, why isn't their response to this to say, you know what?

Here I've been sacrificing. You know, God has given me seven kids, and three of them I've given to the God, that pile of stones, to be killed. And that God can't stop the river.

That God can't knock down the walls. Like, maybe that God that I'm sacrificing my children to, and I gave my daughter so she could be a prostitute in the temple, so that strange men could have sex.

Like, I shouldn't be doing that, because this idol can't do that. I should find out more about that Lord.

[40 : 03] I should find out if that Lord would have me. I should find out what his ways are. But the response is to fight.

And even in the story of Ai defeating the Jewish people at the first thing, even then it should be, you know, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Do you know what? There's something else going on here.

And I don't know why the Lord did this, but everybody just remember what he did to the Jordan River. Remember what he did to Jericho. So maybe he is giving us an extra day or two or week to think about what we've done and to turn to him.

You know, it's, it's, it's, why is it that we fight against the Lord? Like, why is it? Why is it that when I've gone through evidence, why there's actually really good historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, why is it that people respond by mocking me?

Why is it that they'll send me an email saying, you just worship sky daddy, sky daddy, sky daddy.

Like, why do they do that? Like, why? Like, why?

[41 : 12] That's not the necessary obvious response. Because you see, the fact of the matter is that people do respond with repentance and faith.

The message of the Bible is that God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but rather that he would turn from his wickedness and live. And just, we're going to jump ahead. What happens immediately after this is a, is a time when the ark representing the presence of God himself comes into a particular place and the people of Israel are divided in two groups with that at the front. And they're all listening to the law, all of the Bible being read and proclaimed. And it's written on stone, the summary of it, which we now call the 10 commandments. But, and it's, it's all, it's what's called a covenant renewal ceremony.

And look at verse 33. And in verse 33, it says, and all Israel, sojourner, all Israel. Who is Israel? Sojourner as well as native born.

With their elders and officers and their judges stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Half of them in front of, ta-da-da-da-da-da-da.

[42 : 22] To bless the people of Israel. All Israel. And who's being blessed? Sojourners. People who are not Jewish. And look at the very end of the chapter. And, and, and verse 35.

And there was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all of the assembly of Israel. All the women, all the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them. I said in chapter two of the book of Judges, it's key to reading the whole book of Judges, is Rahab's response to the miracles.

And her response to the miracles is even though she's a pagan, she says, the Lord must be God. I want to belong to him. May he, will he have mercy on me?

And that is what carries all the way through. And now we see that many Canaanites have become Jewish. The response of AI to fight is not the only response.

And it's not the response that the Lord wants. The Lord takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but that he or she will turn from their wickedness and live.

[43:31] Canaanites are joining. They are joining. You see, here's the thing. We belong to the Lord by nature. And we reject belonging to him in our rebellion and in our sin.

But the Lord's desire is that we will once again belong to him. And that only comes through something which is hinted at at the end of the story of the destruction of AI, which is how we, by grace, can belong to the Lord so that we not only belong to the Lord by nature, but also by grace. Because in chapter, in verse 29, we see that the king of AI died on a pole and is buried under stones outside the city gate.

And every Christian who reads this has to remember that this is part of a bigger story. And we also understand there was a king who died on a tree outside the city and was buried under stone.

One king thought he was a god. But the true king knew that he was, in fact, the Lord. The same Lord who had stopped the Jordan and toppled Jericho and won the battle.

[44:55] He was the Lord. One king, AI, thought he was a god. There is, in fact, a true god who was a king. One king sent people out to die. That's why he's still alive.

One people sent people out to die. The true king came to die so that people will live. One king lived a horrible life. The true king lived a life that was good and beautiful and true.

One king led his people to death. The true king delivers his people from death into eternal life. One king dies in defeat.

One king dies, the true king dies, saying, It is accomplished. The end has been reached. My purpose for coming, which is to die as a sacrifice of sins for many, has been accomplished.

One king dies against his will. One king dies because it is his love that keeps him to the cross. One king dies for his rebellion and his sin, and the true king dies, bearing the sin of you and me.

[46:03] One king died justly for his evil. One died sinless, but he died in mercy, bearing the justice, the death that you and I deserve.

One king died on our behalf, ultimately for mercy and grace, so that we might receive an unmerited gift.

God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but that he would turn from his wickedness and live.

So, brothers and sisters, I mean, if you haven't given your life to Christ, God, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, there's no better time than right now to call out to him and say, Lord, have mercy upon me.

I want to be yours, and he will not cast you away. And this text shows us that one of the things in the covenant is that the Lord wants all of his people to read all of his word for all of their life, and that's what he wants us to do, and he wants us to pray big prayers.

[47:08] He wants us to pray for the salvation of others. He wants us to pray about the war in Ukraine. He wants us to pray for peace in the Middle East. He wants us to pray for the end of abortion.

He wants you to pray for parking spots. He wants you to pray. Invite you to stand. Father, we give you thanks and praise that out of love for us, God, the Son of God, set aside his appearance as God, but remaining God, took into himself our human nature, and came amongst us, born of the Virgin Mary, living the life that we should live but couldn't, and dying the death that we should, but he died in our place.

We thank you that he died in our place. We thank you that he rose from the dead. We thank you that his resurrection from the dead changes everything. We thank you that he will come again in glory.

We thank you, Father, that you are sovereign over all things, and we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would bring the gospel and your word deeply into our hearts. It is your word and the gospel

that might form us.

And, Father, we ask that you would help us to listen, not to the stories that we tell ourselves, that we're ugly or that we're losers or that any of those things, but, Father, to listen to the stories that you speak to us through your word and the power of your Holy Spirit that you want to have form us, of the true king who loved us so much and loved each one of us so much that he died for us.

[48:50] Father, may that be the story that is whispered into our ears and forms our lives. And as that story is whispered into our lives and forms us, Father, may you help us to be people of prayer, praying big prayers and small prayers, teeny, teensy, weensy prayers, and everything in between.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen.