

SERMON: Comfort Zones and the Comforter

GOOD Morning OIC AND WELCOME TO FATHER'S HOUSE

Today, we will see the history of God's Chosen People, the Israelites, expand further into their Promised Land of Canaan. I closed my last Message with the following words: God is Spirit and omnipotent. Don't depend on your own strength, but on God's. We read how God allows GIANTS in front of us to bring Glory to His Son and Himself. **They are not there to crush us!**

We find in the history of Israel entering the *Promised Land* that Joshua's calling shows God's faithfulness to keep His Promise to His Leader and to His People. Joshua's personal courage was a large part of the Lord's command to him at his calling to replace the leader Moses. This courage is really a gift also. When God calls us to any *Mission Impossible* such as conquering Jericho and the Giants in Canaan, He gives all that is needed to obey our calling. So Joshua is a great example of victorious Christian living on this side of the Cross of Christ.

THE FINAL CAPTURE AND VICTORY AT AI

22 Meanwhile, the Israelites who were inside the town came out and attacked the enemy from the rear. So the men of Ai were caught in the middle, with Israelite fighters on both sides. Israel attacked them, and not a single person survived or escaped. 23 Only the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua. 24 When the Israelite army finished chasing and killing all the men of Ai in the open fields, they went back and finished off everyone inside. 25 So the entire population of Ai, including men and women, was wiped out that day—12,000 in all. 26 For Joshua kept holding out his spear until everyone who had lived in Ai was completely destroyed. 27 Only the livestock and the treasures of the town were not destroyed, for the Israelites kept these as plunder for themselves, as the LORD had commanded Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned the town of Ai, and it became a permanent mound of ruins, desolate to this very day.

HOLDING OUT THE GOSPEL AS A SPEAR TO SAVE A SINFUL WORLD

26 For Joshua kept holding out his spear until everyone who had lived in Ai was completely destroyed. As we Followers of Jesus do what we can to seek and save the Lost for Jesus, we are often tempted by the devil to give up our work for it “appears” to produce no fruit. Jesus declared His Mission after He visited the home of a tax collector, the lowest of low in the social class at that time. We read in (Luke 19.5-10) 5 When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” 6 Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. 7 But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. 8 Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” 9 Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Zacchaeus heart was filled with joy knowing that Jesus chose to visit him. The Spirit of God put joy about Jesus into Zacchaeus for a joyful repentance of sins, and restitution, plus generosity. Jesus set the example for us Christians to seek and save all levels of society. Jesus saved men by dying for their sins; we save men by telling them that truly Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every prayer, tract, sermon, or witness to seek and save the Lost is important to God. By persisting and persevering in even the smallest thing, there may be great fruit someday in the future. Like Joshua, we must be **holding out the spear of the Gospel until every nation in the world has heard it.**

As Jesus said in **(Matthew 24.14)** *And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then the end will come.*

Before Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, the only way to rid the earth of gross sin as in Canaan, was to rid the earth of the sinners. But Jesus' sacrifice gives forgiveness for all who will believe His Gospel. Like Joshua, Christians hold out the Gospel Spear until all sin, not sinners, is killed!

So next we read that Joshua dispatches the King of Ai as a warning to all for God's judgment of evil living. **(Joshua 8.29/BECK):** *But the King of Ai he hanged on a tree {impaled the king of Ai on a sharpened pole} and left him there until evening. At sunset the Israelites took down the body, as Joshua commanded, and threw it in front of the town gate. They piled a great heap of stones over him that can still be seen today.* Joshua was pronouncing God's judgment as stated in the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul wrote this in **(Galatians 3.13)** *For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

The LORD's Covenant Renewed – The Holy Spirit – The Comforter

The Israelite Army of fighters and people had walked on dry ground through the Jordan River at flood stage. They had seen God make the walls of Jericho come tumbling down to allow their victory to defeat the King of Jericho. They had experienced the omnipotent power in the Presence of the Spirit of God in these miracles. A more personal relationship with God's Spirit could not only occur for most Believers in the LORD until after Jesus bought it by His Cross. But God's people knew of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. They knew of His powerful actions as in their Scriptures on **Creation**. **(Genesis 1.2)** *says: The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.* God's People also knew of God's Spirit through the messages of Isaiah the prophet. In about 700 B.C. Isaiah tells how they were grieving and calling out to God for Him to return in power as with Moses. We read this in **(Isaiah 63.10-14):** *10 But they rebelled against him and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he became their enemy and fought against them. 11 Then they remembered those days of old when Moses led his people out of Egypt. They cried out, "Where is the one who brought Israel through the sea, with Moses as their shepherd? Where is the one who sent his Holy Spirit to be among his people? 12 Where is the one whose power was displayed when Moses lifted up his hand—the one who divided the sea before them, making himself famous forever? 13 Where is the one who led them through the bottom of the sea? They were like fine stallions racing through the desert, never stumbling. 14 As with cattle going down into a peaceful valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. You led your people, LORD, and gained a magnificent reputation."*

In the Old Testament **Hebrew** Scriptures Holy Spirit is named **Ruah**, the same Hebrew word for breath. The New Testament writers call Him **paracletos/Greek**. This literally means *one called alongside to help*. He was given to all Believers in Jesus beginning on Pentecost Sunday, A.D. 30. Jesus commanded His disciples in **(Acts 1.4-5)** *4 Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. 5 John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* Whatever particular ministry the Holy Spirit has in the Old and the New Testaments, all God's People knew and should still know, that He was and is God's omnipotent Presence on Earth. He showed up at the Red Sea with Moses, at the Jordan River with Joshua...and in all of God's deliverance for His people Israel. Since Jesus came, He does the same as always. He delivers sinners from Satan's grasp and imparts the gift of Faith in Jesus. Now He always testifies of Jesus until we see Jesus *face to face*.

Today Holy Spirit gives Christians Peace as in **(Isaiah 63.14)** *14 As with cattle going down into a peaceful valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.* Under Joshua's command, the LORD reminded the younger generation of Israelites, who were in the Promised Land, that the sin of disobeying God's Law was more dangerous than any army or foe. We too, after receiving great

victories by God's Spirit in power, may have a Peace or Comfort Zone by the Comforter. "Comforter" is one of the English Bible translations of *parakletos*/*Greek*. My point in this Message is that the LORD was warning the Israelite Armies that their war against "sin" was not over.

JOSHUA LEADS THE PEOPLE TO RECOMMITMENT TO GOD'S LAW

Reading (**Joshua 8.30-32**): *30 Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal. 31 He followed the commands that Moses the LORD's servant had written in the Book of Instruction: "Make me an altar from stones that are uncut and have not been shaped with iron tools." Then on the altar they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD. 32 And as the Israelites watched, Joshua copied onto the stones of the altar the instructions Moses had given them.*

Note how Joshua remembered what God had commanded Moses in (**Exodus 20.25**): *If you use stones to build my altar, use only natural, **uncut** stones. Do not shape the stones with a tool, for that would make the altar unfit for holy use.* God is teaching men that because they are born in sin, any improvement they attempt with tools into the rocks God had created naturally, makes them unfit for holy use. **So it is today with any philosophy or inventions of men in the world to add, or to improve, or to change the all- sufficiency of Jesus Christ, the stone that the builders rejected.** As the Apostle Peter wrote in (**1 Peter 2.7b**) *The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.* In (**Joshua 8.31b**) *Then on the altar they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to the LORD.* This tells us that God's people presented blood sacrifices to the LORD on His Altar. The LORD, God the Father, placed His Son Jesus on the Cross, His Altar, as the Final Blood Sacrifice for all time....for our eternal peace. **Jesus' work on the Cross was satisfactory obedience to God His Father. This finished work needs no addition or altering. For by His Blood Sacrifice He saved all who believe from perishing under judgment.**

We Christians also might err or make a serious mistake in our thinking when we dream or desire to do something over again in life. Maybe it was a failure and maybe it led to sin. But we are thinking unholy; we are cutting into the Rock of our Salvation with a sinful tool of thought. We cannot change the past, only bring it to Jesus in prayer. On His Cross in incomparable suffering, Jesus paid attention to the local language as He said: "It is finished!" As we read in (**John 19.30**) *When he had taken the sour wine, Jesus said, "It is accomplished!" (*tetelestai* | *τετέλεσται*) And he bowed his head and handed over his spirit.* He spoke this in Greek for He knew that His last words would be spoken throughout Jerusalem and beyond in the Greek: *Tetelestai*. Greek was the business language at the time of Jesus' Crucifixion. Regarding real estate business it meant "The Mortgage is PAID IN FULL." Today I saw a car in Osaka that had these words, "PAID IN FULL," in English on his license plate holder. We Christians have something so much greater than a new car paid or bought for us...the Purchase of our Home in Heaven, PAID IN FULL. As we continue in this faith, despite our failures, we have our New Covenant of Jesus' Blood renewed day by day! We need no "do-overs" for *It is Finished*.

Next, Joshua repeats an **object lesson** that Moses had taught Israel years before. Reading in (**Joshua 8.33**) *Then all the Israelites—foreigners and native-born alike—along with the elders, officers, and judges, were divided into two groups. One group stood in front of Mount Gerizim, the other in front of Mount Ebal. Each group faced the other, and between them stood the Levitical priests carrying the LORD's Covenant.* This was all done according to the commands that Moses, the servant of the LORD had previously given. He had instructed Joshua to wait until they had crossed the Jordan and arrived at Mount Ebal for this object lesson. This reminds the people to make a serious decision: are they committed to obey God's LAW or not! The tribes on Mount Gerizim proclaim blessings to all Israelites who obey God's Law given to Moses. The tribes on Mount Ebal proclaim curses on all who don't obey God's Law given by God to Moses. The Levitical Priests spoke to accept responsibility to affect obedience by the people. The people actually answered AMEN when they heard both the blessing and cursing promises. God always

looked at hearts of His people. He knew that no one Israelite could keep the Law perfectly. He knew those who really tried to follow the Law in spirit out of love for Him! Today, we have the same God as theirs. Jesus intercedes for us, but even with that fact, Jesus made it clear that the command to love God from the heart was not changed. Jesus stated this in **(Matthew 22.36-38)** 36 “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” 37 Jesus replied, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

Joshua made sure that all the people, young and old, heard the *Blessings and Cursings* that had commanded through Moses. This **object lesson on obedience** was timed until the *smoke and Adrenaline of battle* had settled into a comfort zone of peace in their Promised Land.

God created mankind. He knows how we all can have what may be called *foxhole prayers* when our lives are threatened in a battle, either physical or spiritual. Most foot soldiers in all the armies of the world dig *foxholes* to be better protected from enemy gunfire. Too often after the battle ends, the soldiers forget God who rescued them. Well, we Christians are also very human in this way. God knew that after conquering the most impossible challenges of Crossing the Jordan River and the Walls of Jericho that the Israelites' courage in battle could become complacency and *spiritual sloth or laziness!*

Also remember that the Israelites who marched in courage with Joshua were mere children when God worked His wonders in Egypt and in crossing the Red Sea. They probably remembered some details, but the Lord knew that they needed to make a Re-commitment *to the Lord*, not because of sin, but because they may feel the War is over. Truly the physical challenges ahead would be less, but the spiritual dangers in a very comfortable zone, or *Comfort Zone*, in life has different dangers.

All of Israel stood on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and shouted Amen to the spoken curses and blessings for breaking or obeying the Laws of God. I expect that God wanted them to fear Him more than the Canaanite soldiers and giant men that they faced in the wars that lay before them. He wanted this fear because He loved them. In the generations ahead some men like David would love God from the heart, while living lives to keep the Law. God wanted, and still wants, heart to heart relationships. Yet the Bible tells us that King David is an example of how *feeling that the war is over in a Comfort Zone can be dangerous.*

David and Bathsheba – Dangers of Sin in a Comfort Zone

Reading **(2 Samuel 11.1-3)**: *In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem. Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, “She is **Bathsheba**, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”*

David would commit adultery with Bathsheba. To hide his sin as she was pregnant, he ordered General Joab to order her husband, Uriah, to a suicidal position in a battle. That was murder. David's heart for God led him to a total surrender in repentance and love to his Lord. **Sin has a high cost! It cost David his first born son with Bathsheba as King of Israel. After God took the baby away, He pronounced continual wars in David's Family.** David never stopped loving God. His repentance was so deep and beautiful that God put it into the Bible in Psalm 51. It has been a place for millions of Christians to go to get their heart back in close relationship with the Lord Jesus after sinning. King David knew that the power to open the Red Sea was the same power, or Person, to deliver us from temptation and sin. For David wrote in **(Psalm 51.12/KJ21)** *Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit.*

The object lesson at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim was intended to prevent such sin as King David's by any of God's people. Looking again at Jesus words in **(Matthew 22.37-38)** 37 *Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."* 38 *This is the first and greatest commandment.* King David had broken God's Laws by adultery and murder. I believe that he had earlier committed his life completely to always love *the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.* He failed...he sinned..he repented...he kept loving the LORD! It was not the END for David. It need not be for anyone here as well who has sinned against God.

The Israelites traveling through the wilderness toward the Promised Land had taken sin lightly and many died under God's wrath in the wilderness. In 1 Corinthians Chapter 10 the Apostle Paul is warning Christians to not be complacent or slothful in their spiritual life as the Israelites had been! We read how the Apostle Paul is reminding the Corinthians to learn from Israel's failures to resist sin.

Reading **(1 Corinthians 10.6-12)** 6 *These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, 7 or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, "The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry."* 8 *And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.* 9 *Nor should we put Christ to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites.* 10 *And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death.* 11 *These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.* 12 ***If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.***

Paul is the same Apostle of Jesus who said to these same Corinthians in **(2 Corinthians 7.4)** *I have the highest confidence in you, and I take great pride in you. You have greatly encouraged me and made me happy despite all our troubles.* His loving care for Jesus' Sheep also had him write in **(Hebrews 10.35)** *So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you!* **This last Bible verse really hits or lines up with the Israelite younger generation at Mount Ebal & Gerizim! It also fits with the call to stay humble in the warning in (1 Corinthians 10.12) *If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.*** Humble living is confident living. Worldly sinners, and too often we Christians, don't understand that humility and confidence are married together in the heart of maturing Christians! Christians with a heart like King David's. Paul wants the Christians he warns to lean hard on this next Bible verse. **(1 Corinthians 10.13)** *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.* Leaning hard on this verse, knowing our weaknesses, creates confidence in Jesus and God's willingness to help us at all times.

Now, these children of the Israelites who that had rebelled in the Wilderness had His Law repeated on the "safer" side of the Jordan River. God wanted to create a healthy fear to help this younger generation of His Chosen people to choose God over sin. Without living in *fear of judgment*, we must never take sin lightly. I have found that when I struggle with some level of depression, Satan suggests doubts of my safety in Christ. And when I am quite cheerful as I walk close to Jesus, Satan sends temptations of pleasure. Not only the current challenge ahead, but also our moods often require different attitudes of alertness. But the longer I seek to walk with Jesus the more I realize how much power and presence God puts into **(1 Corinthians 10.13): *And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.***

COMFORT ZONES AND THE COMFORTER

Both the power and peace of God's Children is the work of Holy Spirit, the Comforter. This was true for the Israelites entering Canaan, their Promised Land. It is also true for Christians as we

walk with Jesus to our Promised Land in Heaven. Our self-made comfort is often our attempt to force God to keep us in the *Comfort Zone* that He means for only a season of our life. This is another example of building God's Altar with humanly cut or hewn stones which are *unholy* to the Lord. This leads to our grieving the Holy Spirit with vain philosophy or sinful behavior. This is resisting Jesus' true Lordship in our life! This is simply not trusting Jesus and saying to ourselves: "Father knows best!"

As we pray to be staying in that married state of **humility and confidence** in the Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit power will both open our Red Seas before us, but also, convince of dangers from sin, and comfort us with His Presence and Peace. We can have true peace in the middle of the hardest battle by the Spirit of God. We have the Promise of Him as our Helper in temptation in **(1 Corinthians 10.13)**. The Comforter makes Jesus more real to us. His powerful Presence means even greater and greater testimonies that we belong to Jesus! Whenever Holy Spirit shows up in power I always end up saying **"It's Jesus!" And Oh that is so comforting to know!**

Let Us Pray,

REFERENCES

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