

The Weapons Of Our Warfare

A series of sermonic studies in the Book of Joshua

By Egbert Schaller

Preface

The sermonic materials here presented are not designed for general reading, but for the pastor's study, whence they also originated in the ordinary course of parish ministry. It is my hope that they may prove an encouragement and a stimulant for pastors who wish to prepare timely, positive sermons based upon substantial textual selections.

It behooves me to state with emphasis that the outlines herein submitted make no pretense of homiletical perfection and cannot serve as models for the art of sermon-building. Their weaknesses will undoubtedly be apparent to any expert homiletician. Moreover, in their construction the sermons themselves do not appear here as finished products. Essentially, the paragraphs of discourse are extensions of the outline and serve to indicate the trend of development.

Thus the structure of what is offered here is of itself the earnest of my desire, not to beguile busy pastors with the temptation of ready-made pulpit material, but to prime the wellsprings of their prayerful hearts as they seek to gather and organize the riches of God's Word for proclamation to their flocks in these darkening days.

It requires another paragraph to acknowledge my indebtedness and express my gratitude to Pastor G. W. Fischer of Mankato, Minnesota, with whom pleasant hours were spent in joint study of these texts, and without whose encouragement the publication of this work would never have been ventured.

Nicollet, Minnesota E. SCHALLER
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Blueprints

Text: Joshua 1, 1-9.

Theme: How God presents Joshua and Israel with the blueprints for a victorious campaign.

He sends them forth to conquer with

- I. The possession of every battlefield;
- II. The directive of the Word;
- III. The love of the Savior-God.

The Outline:

- I.
 - A. This was the remarkable right of second-generation Israel.
 1. These were the children. The labor is behind them.
 2. Theirs is the end of the road, and they have but to go forward.
 - B. This is the privilege of our Church
 1. We, too, are the children. The great battles are behind us.
 2. There remain skirmishes, but the Truth is ours.
- II.
 - A. The secret of needed strength and courage is allegiance to the Word.
 1. God calls not for strength of character
 2. But for obedience to divine orders.
 - B. This is the strength of our Church.
 1. Our contests must be so fought;

2. To this end, our preoccupation with the Word is essential.

III.

- A. The true General was the Savior-God.
 1. His the voice of effective love;
 2. His the love that will prevail.
- B. We know that voice.
 1. It is an assurance of victory;
 2. It makes us glad to wage the campaign.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

During the coming weeks, it will be a great pleasure to present to you the experiences of Joshua and the people of Israel as they broke through the last barriers that lay between them and the possession of the Promised Land of Canaan.

This was the climax of forty years of bitter desert wanderings, of dangers and battles and setbacks and doubts and fears that had beset God's people since the day that Moses led them out of Egypt. We meet them, now, near the end of the long trail. Glorious Canaan lies before them. But there is yet a way to go; there remain problems and trials to overcome. We find Israel camped on the eastern bank of the Jordan River; and here we join them to share their adventures with them.

There is an especial reason for the fact that this particular part of the story of Israel is very important to us just now; and it is to be hoped that this will become clear to the hearers as we go along. In many ways we are in a position similar to that which Israel occupied at that time. Our Church, having by God's Grace the possession of the pure, saving Truth and doctrine, is living in the last stages of the world's history. God is faithful; and the Canaan of heavenly rest lies before us. But we have a way to go; we have great trials to endure. Serious battles lie before us. Shall we make our journey through these safely? Shall we keep what we have, and shall we fight victoriously for the Truth? We will, if we remember what is given us and what is required of us. The problems of God's people are the same in all ages; therefore in Joshua and Israel we shall see ourselves.

The Apostle Paul gave us anti all true Christians a rule of Christian warfare and victory when he wrote to the Corinthians:

"FOR THOUGH WE WALK IN THE FLESH, WE DO NOT WAR AFTER THE FLESH: FOR THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE ARE NOT CARNAL, BUT MIGHTY THROUGH GOD TO THE PULLING DOWN OF STRONGHOLDS." 2 Cor. 10, 3-4.

I.

- A. It was time for the last campaign. Moses was dead; Israel had a new leader. To this leader the Lord speaks now, commanding him to go forward and take the inheritance promised to the first father of Israel, Abraham, 470 years before. And this was not to be a campaign in which the outcome would be in doubt. God hands Joshua the blueprint of victory, on which the first item was the remarkable fact that every inch of the ground to be taken was already in Israel's possession. God said: vv. 2-5.
 1. Let us take time to look carefully at this nation that was so sure of victory. These people were the children of those who had left Egypt. Some of them were born in the desert; some were babies when their fathers had marched from the land of the Pharaoh. Their parents, however, were dead - for they had sinned in the wilderness, and of all who had known slavery only Joshua and Caleb were left. This second generation was reaping the fruits of the great struggles of the past. The exhausting journeys, the terrible battles, were past. Their fathers had carried them to the banks of the Jordan. Their fathers had seen the plagues in Egypt, had dared the

crossing of the Red Sea, had trembled under Sinai, had fought with the fiery serpents, had drunk the bitter waters of Marah.

2. The Israel we now see is at the end of the road. The really big work had been done. And now they learn that the last steps were cut out for them. They needed only to put their feet down, and whatever they touched, whatever battlefield they entered against the unbelievers, —it was theirs. “That have I given unto you,” the Lord says. What a wonderful prospect. Israel had only to go forward, had only to move, and men would fall away to let them through. The future was a gift for the hosts of God.

B.

1. Now this exactly is the promise conferred upon us. My dear friends, let us see how similar is our situation to that of Joshua’s people. These are still the days of the militant Church; and our Lutheran Church stands at the banks of Jordan, bearing with us the pure Truth, the saving Truth which has been entrusted to us. We bear its doctrines in our hearts; we have them in our Catechism, in our Confessions. But let us remember that we are children of our Fathers. They fought the real battles; they bore the heat of the march. We have inherited their progress. As Abraham left his father’s house and hewed out a new home, so it was Luther who for the Gospel’s sake became the spiritual father of a new people freed from the ignorance and heathenism and despotism of popery. Our forefathers in this country formed a true Lutheran Church only after the most severe struggles and the harshest sacrifices. They fought the serpents of error that tried to invade the Church, and at length brought us, their children, to the peaceful and glorious possession of the Gospel Truth in its fullness. We did not have to wrestle for it; they gave it to us. Therefore we often hold it very cheaply. We did not have to fight for it. How easy to say today: “We are the Church of the pure doctrine.” But let us think of what it cost our fathers to hand it down to us.
2. For we are now to go forward, to carry through until our rest is won. As long as we have the Truth, this promise will hold which the Lord gave to Israel: “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.” We shall have to fight. It is becoming increasingly clear that Satan means to oppose our Church, to tear it apart if he can. False teachers are reaching out for us, powerful men who defy us to prevent them from drawing many people after them. But let us remember that, as of now, we have the blueprint of victory. No man shall stand before us if we move forward on what our Fathers have won. But beware lest we forsake any single part of the Truth. For our victory depends, not only upon our possessing every battle-field through divine promise, but also upon the second item on the blue-print, namely, the directive of the Word.

II.

A.

1. v 7–8. Thus God speaks to Joshua: “Only be strong and courageous.” Is it true, then, that victory and success belong to those who fear not? Is it true that Israel will conquer if Joshua is a brave man? It is one of the fatal mistakes of the people of this world to believe that courage will always come out on top. Bravery and fearlessness are the quality of fools unless they are based upon something sound and real. The Lord does not simply call on Israel for bravery against the enemy, for a strong and determined character. He says: “Have the bravery to observe all that Moses has commanded.”

2. The success of this general and his army of God's people depends upon his obeying divine orders. As we hear this command in our day, so Joshua heard it, and we shall not overlook the supreme importance of what he heard. It may seem a strange thing to tell a man who must lead a fighting nation against a foe, against the heathen who are living in Canaan. Must not a general survey the ground, plan his battles, estimate the strength of the foe, overcome him with superior strategy? "No," says the Lord: "Keep your eye on the Book." Do not let it get away from you for a moment. Day and night meditate therein. Know it by heart; do according to it. Do not depart from its instruction either one way or another. The victory of God's people is not won by strategy and more powerful armaments. They must put their feet where God directs them to put their feet; and then the ground is theirs.

B.

1. How familiar this is to us, and how hard to learn! If we are to remain the Church of the Truth, if we are to finish the pilgrimage of our fathers, it will not be done by clever planning and shrewd attacks. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. The Word of God is our defense and hope. Let us give up but a single word of it, and we have lost. Let us adopt a false confession, and we have forfeited our claim to Canaan. Many churches have done just that; others are in process of doing so. In place of the Word, they have turned to expediency, to unionism, to union with out unity. It is folly. We must hold to the Word.
2. And this must not merely be a phrase with us. Having the Bible on our pulpits will not guarantee it. We must meditate, study, and ponder in this Word. We must make our Catechism again a household tool of our daily life. If we think we know it, we shall find that we do not know it as we should. Our Church does not need sharp officials and smart politicians. It needs fathers and mothers and children who know their Bible passages and what they mean. My friends, this was and is and always will be the source of the courage and strength that will see our Church through dark days; yes, this is the highest form of daring in a world where God's wisdom is regarded as folly: to render the obedience of bondservants to the Word of God. There is no substitute for this in the blueprint of victory.

III.

A.

1. For, after all, behind this Word is the God who promises, and in whom our future is laid. The Word of God is not a magic medal or charm. It is invincible because he who has it has with him the Savior-God and His love. To this the Lord points Joshua: v. 9. Have not *I* commanded thee? God need say no more to Joshua. For Joshua remembers the Passover night in Egypt; he remembers the Red Sea; he remembers the rock out of which sweet water flowed for the thirsting multitude. He remembers the great mercies of this God, and His marvellous works. This was the God who delivered Israel - the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, etc.
2. Again and again God's love had prevailed, even against the fiery serpents, even against the murmurings of a rebellious people. Fathers had to die; Moses and Aaron died because of their disobedience. But this God saw the people through. Now here they are, at the end of the road, and God has not ceased to love them. His Word will not deceive or mislead; nor will His promises fail. This fact was the keystone of victory.

B.

1. And it is no less so with us. We know that voice which speaks to Joshua. It spoke to us from the Cross, and told us that here was the love of God toward us manifested, in that God laid down the life of His Son for us, to redeem us, to make us His own, to rob Satan of his victory, to deliver us safely to our home.
2. This love should make us glad to wage the campaign that lies ahead. Hymn 447.

The First Victory

Text: Joshua 2, 1–11

Theme: The first victory in Canaan

- I. A defeat for Joshua.
- II. A victory for Joshua.
- III. An object lesson for the Church.

The Outline:

- I.
 - A. Joshua follows a general's instinct, not the Word.
 1. His approach is wrong;
 2. His technique is stealth;
 3. The outlook is bleak.
 - B. The general's scheming comes to naught.
 1. The spies go;
 2. The spies return with flax-straw in their hair and no information.
- II.
 - A. Won in a strange place;
 - B. Won before Joshua or the Church knew about it;
 1. The weapons and victor—the Word;
 2. The victory—a soul in the stronghold of the enemy.
- III.
 - A. God had defined the campaign;
 - B. Now Israel learns to see its place in the campaign.
 1. Not as a weapon
 2. But as a harvester of God's gifts.
 - a. The souls he gives;
 - b. The land he promises.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

In last Sunday's service we began a series of summer studies in the book of Joshua. Especially for the sake of those who did not hear the first sermon, let me briefly set forth again the central thought of the story of the Old Testament that we here have before us. After the death of Moses, God appointed Joshua leader of Israel. We find the new leader and his people camped on the eastern shore of the Jordan River. They look across, and there is the Promised Land toward which they have been marching for over forty years since their fathers left the land of Egypt. Israel has come near the end of its journey. Their parents, who had died in the desert, had passed through terrible days, great dangers, and battles. Now the children are at the threshold of final victory. Just a few marches, a few more battles and the Promised Land is theirs to enjoy in peace.

This is a picture of the present situation of our Church. Our Fathers came to this country and, by many struggles, despite many mistakes, established a true Lutheran Church here. They have handed down to us the precious fruits of their battles with error. Today we, their children, are much nearer the ultimate, perfect enjoyment of the eternal Promised Land toward which we march. We hold in our hands the sacred, pure Gospel. We have a way to go, battles to fight. Will we firmly go forward and take the future? Will we hold the gains won by our fathers? Or will our Church die in the wilderness of the world and the swamps of false doctrine?

God came to Joshua, as we heard last Sunday, and offered him the blueprint of a final victorious campaign. He told him: Every foot of the land ahead of you, I have given it to you. It is yours for the taking. Only one thing: Keep to the Word that I have given you through Moses. Hold fast to the Book of the Law; meditate therein day and night. Never mind being a general; just be a faithful shepherd of my people; do not depart from my directions. The Word of God will give you success; for behind it and in it am I, the Savior-God.

You see, of course, that this is of greatest importance also for us. Our Church will be victorious, but only if it continues fully in the words of this Book. To depart from it into false doctrine and the commandments of men—that will be the end. It is only through the Word of God that we keep our Savior-God.

Now we turn to our text.

I.

- A. Of what victory do we speak? There was no battle. The children of Israel have not moved a step from their camp on the eastern bank of the Jordan. But there has been an act of war nevertheless; and it was an act of war performed by Joshua. The victory, however, was not his. On the contrary, it was a defeat for Joshua.
 1. Sending spies into the city of the enemy is an act of war. According to the report before us, that is what Joshua did. Thus we see him starting the final campaign for the Promised Land; and despite the Lord's clear instructions and promises, he starts the campaign on the wrong foot. His approach to the task is wrong, at the very outset. We can see this if we ask: "Why send spies? What is the purpose?" We know why military generals send out spies. They have a problem of warfare on their hands. They have so and so many fighting men; the battleground is arranged so and so. Now there is a safer chance of victory if the general knows how many men the enemy has and how well prepared he is. This is accepted strategy of warfare among men. But was Joshua to be such a general? Did not the Lord tell him: Every battleground is yours? Only study my Word? Oh, Joshua is relying on the wrong weapons. We see it right away.
 2. We see it again when we hear that he gave the spies their instructions secretly. Joshua did not want Israel to know he had sent them. Now that is always suspicious, when a leader of God's people thinks he must, for the people's welfare, do something stealthily and behind their backs. And there was something wrong here, too. Joshua did not want Israel to know that he had sent spies because he did not know what kind of report they would bring back, and he was afraid of the reaction. If they brought an optimistic report, his soldiers might get too self-confident; if they brought an alarming report of the strength of the enemy, Israel might become frightened and refuse to go forward, as their fathers had forty years before. So we see, Joshua was scheming and judging his chances of victory in a purely fleshly, carnal way. He was not relying upon divine promises, but upon strategy.
 3. When a leader of the Church acts that way, the outlook for victory is bleak, all about us we see the same false attitude being taken in the churches of today. Men decided what is expedient, not by following the directions of God's Word, but by how for their own good they can keep the people in ignorance of what is going on. Instead of doing exactly what God's Word says and leaving the

results to the Lord, they devise their own strategy and stretch the Word a little here and there, hoping to win a victory against error and heathenism. So, for example, this is done: Instead of rejecting or deferring the applications for membership of people affiliated with a lodge until they see their error and leave the lodge, it is the human strategy of some to take them into the Church first and afterward seek to win them over. Rather than reject out of hand the idolatry of Scouting, the game in some quarters is to take Scouting into the Church and make it Christian.

B.

1. Of course, victory is not won that way. It is contrary to Scripture. General Joshua suffers defeat in his first advance. Just consider the story. The spies obediently enter the first enemy city, Jericho. They are brave, but they make no headway with their mission. Hardly have they sneaked into a very doubtful lodging house when the police are at the door. So they dig in under the flax straw on the roof, stay until dark, and escape over the city wall to hurry back to their people.
2. Accomplished? Nothing. They bring back itching flax straw on their skins and no material information whatever. Their report to Joshua is: v.24. Well, this much Joshua knew before the spies started out. God had told him. Did Joshua need the additional witness of two men who actually knew nothing but what one woman of dubious reputation had told them? Yes, the general had failed. It was a real defeat for him.

II.

A. Where, then, does the victory come in of which we are speaking? Let us return to the story, and we shall see that God won, and the people of Israel won, a victory entirely without the help of Joshua.

It was a victory won in a strange place, to be sure: in a house of ill repute, in the heart of a dissolute woman. Surely it was God Who saved the day. He led the spies to that house. They were looking for a place where they would not be detected. It was too easy to see that they were not local men, but outsiders in Jericho. So they registered in what was undoubtedly a cheap lodging-house, or inn, which was used for immoral purposes and where it was not custom to check too closely on who went in and out. No question would be asked. The spies thought it a good hideout.

But now comes the amazing story. Rahab operated this bawdyhouse. This poor heathen woman had lost body and soul to Satan. But when the military police came to the door and demanded the strangers, Rahab put them off until she had rushed upstairs, alerted the spies, and hidden them away. Then she came back and allowed the place to be searched while she explained very convincingly how the men had left at dusk and which direction they had taken, thus sending the police off on a wild chase.

The secret of her strange conduct is revealed as Rahab explains to the spies. It is a glorious story. In Rahab we see a woman greatly distressed and troubled over her sins. Who can relate or explain what she suffered ever since the Holy Spirit had touched her heart? For He had - you listened to her confession. She was convinced that the God of Israel was the true God. She and, as we learn later, her parents and their home, had become converts to the faith of Israel. But until now, they had no peace and no way of knowing how to become united with God's people. There can be no doubt that Rahab had given up her evil way of life, though her reputation remained bad. Hebrews 11, 31: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not, when she had received the spies with peace." No doubt her faith was still very imperfect and weak. But she was a child of God.

B.

1. Surely, now you see the victory, and how it was won. It was won before Joshua or Israel knew anything about it. It is the only kind of victory God cares anything about. And how had it been won? Rahab tells us: "We have HEARD." Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Yes, the message of the Savior-God had gotten through: the tidings of His love. It came in advance of Israel and it worked its wonders in the hearts of a few people in Jericho.
2. God had gained souls in the stronghold of the enemy. Rahab and her house were members of God's people, waiting only to be separated from their heathen neighbors and be joined to the Church. Yes, and wonder of all wonders, God had gained an ancestor for His Son. When He was born into the world, the blood of Rahab was in his veins. She became the great-grandmother of David, of whose house and lineage Jesus came according to the flesh. (Matt. 1, 5). Marvelous are the ways of God.

III.

- A. And great is the lesson of all this for our Church. It is a significant piece of instruction. We have an assignment in this world. It is to remain victorious against the forces of Satan. This requires a campaign, battles, struggles; and God has organized this campaign for us as he did for Israel. Let us repeat the words of the Apostle Paul that we heard last Sunday and of which we said that they must be the guideline of the Church and of every Christian in his march toward heaven. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." 2 Cor. 10, 4. These are mighty words. In the defeat of Joshua we see again that our weapons are not carnal, fleshly, human. So great is the temptation of the Church to use the weapons of men. Joshua did it with the spies. It was and is a mistake. For our victories are not won that way. Among men, there is no confidence in any weapon unless it is like a sword or a cannon or a bomb, and the bigger the better. But Paul says: The weapons of the Church ARE MIGHTY and pull down strongholds. Look at what the Word accomplished in Jericho.
- B.
 1. Now Israel learns another thing for its campaign, and we learn with her. The Church herself must not be used as a carnal weapon. She is not there as a mighty earthly force, as an agency whose power grows in direct ratio to its size until it overshadows earthly principalities and drives wedges into the enemy by legal, political, or military means. That is the way the enemy fights, but God's people will never win a victory on that battlefield.
 2. God sends his Church to harvest the victories that He has won. Through her he casts abroad the message of His power and His love; with that message He wins hearts. And the Church is to go forth and gather such people in. We are called harvesters. A harvester does not go out and grow or ripen grain with power machinery. He just gathers in what the Lord provides, no more, no less. We are to let the Word speak in the lives of men and then bring saved souls into the councils of the righteous. We are to let the Word speak in our own lives always, and thus at last reap the fine fruits of eternal life.

Battle Formation

Text: Joshua 3, 9–17

Theme: *How Israel crosses the Jordan in the true formation of the Church.*

- I. As a mighty army.

- II. With the cross of Jesus going on before.
- III. With eyes front.

The Outline:

- I.
 - A. Why the Israelites can be so described.
 - 1. They advance toward enemies;
 - 2. They face the problems of an army.
 - B. Thus is the true formation of the Church.
 - 1. Closed ranks against enemies;
 - 2. Facing the problems of an army.
- II.
 - A. The ark goes before Israel.
 - 1. What it contains;
 - 2. What it means;
 - 3. How it advances.
 - B. Thus must the Church march behind the cross of Christ.
 - 1. This means to us what the ark meant to Israel;
 - 2. Where this goes, there is our God.
- III.
 - A. Note the instructions.
 - 1. The ark far ahead;
 - 2. The people's eyes on it;
 - 3. The reason.
 - B. Note the results.
 - 1. Difficulties disappear;
 - 2. The Lord deals with them.
 - C. This is the proper marching style of a true Church.
 - 1. It is not distracted by difficulties;
 - 2. It follows the Word;
 - 3. This rule holds for the individuals as well.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

There is an old campaign hymn that has been eagerly sung by many Christians and has found its way also into our hymnal. It begins:

Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus Going on before

And it explains its subject in the second stanza, which says:

Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God.

This hymn has been so much misused that we seldom employ it in our Lutheran worship. It seems that every crusade in our country, of whatever kind, borrows it for its purposes, with nonsensical and sometimes blasphemous results. When we sing this hymn today, as we shall, let us be sure that we understand what we are singing about.

We are moved to sing it as we watch the Church of the Old Testament under the direction of its leader Joshua break camp and set out on its first march in the conquest of the land of Canaan. It is not, indeed, the Holy Church of all believers that we see here; for that is invisible, known only to God, who knows the hearts in which true faith abides. But Israel is the true visible Church, for it marches under God's direction to obtain God's promises. Its actions are governed entirely by the Word of God. That is why, although its members were much burdened by their sinful flesh and imperfect in their performance of God's will, although no doubt in its midst there were also some unbelievers and hypocrites, we may call it the true visible Church of the Old Testament; and that is why we may compare the true visible Church of today with Israel. We see how we shall fare if we retain the character of a true visible Church.

For our further instruction, let us today continue our meditations on this subject.

I.

- A. When we think back to what we have learned from our two previous texts, we might be moved to ask: Is it ever correct to describe God's true Church as an army? For have we not seen that the Church cannot progress and win victories like an army? Was not this the whole point of our lessons thus far, that Israel was not to conquer Canaan with fleshly weapons, or with its courage and strength of arms, but by obedience to the Word of God? Was not Joshua told, and was it not proved to him by his experience with the spies, that he was to lead Israel, not as a general but as a shepherd?
1. All this, as we have learned it, must be firmly kept in mind, also when we let our voices sing: "Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God." For the Church is not an army in the ordinary sense. It is only LIKE an army when it moves, as the poet correctly says. What this means to the visible Church becomes plain as we observe the people of Israel, as we watch them prepare to cross, and then cross, the Jordan River. I could not read the whole story to you, since it is too long; but from our text it is easy to see that this huge congregation is not in outward army formation. Here are no divisions, rank on rank, bristling with weapons, but men, women, and children in families and tribes, carrying their tent homes with them. And yet they must seem like an army because they are engaged in a project that certainly is not like the normal occupation of fathers, mothers, children, —of families. Who but an army would think of marching forward with such a prospect as Israel had? Joshua gives the order of the day and says: v. 10. The whole future is war. Everywhere, nothing but enemies: powerful heathen tribes in every direction bar the way and must be overcome. All that can possibly be anticipated by Israel is battle.
 2. Moreover, this Church of God is like a mighty army in that it has to deal with all the problems of an army. It has a river to cross, a river without bridges; and there will be no wading, because the river is in flood. The sick and the weak must be transported, supplies kept moving. This is difficult because the earth was never built to accommodate armies and army movements. It was made for men to live in peace, each family in its home and on its ground. Armies are unnatural; therefore they are in constant conflict with nature. But Israel, the true visible Church of God, was also a most unearthly creation of God. In a sinful world, nothing is geared right for this Church, and thus it must make its way against great obstacles.
- B.
1. All this is as true today as it ever was. The true formation of the Church is governed by the fact that, though it is without carnal weapons, it must ever be likened to an army because it faces the problems of an army. And where a Church body forgets this, it is lost. If the individual Christian forgets this, he will stay behind and be devoured. It is true that the Apostle

admonishes us: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Rom. 12:18. And as far as in us lies, we would gladly, and do. The true Christian and the true visible Church are not looking for trouble, nor do they want fighting. Often they are accused of this. Our Church is said to be quarrelsome. By refusing to have fellowship with error and entering into partnership with errorists, we suffer the reproach of dividing the Church and causing enmity. That is nonsense. We are like an army, not because we like to fight, but because, whether we like it or not, the world is our enemy and its lies, its deceit, and wickedness are murderous weapons. Wherever we go forward, as Israel did, we are at once faced with Canaanites and Hittites. Israel might have made deals with the heathen, compromised with them, and so might we; but then we are no longer a true Church of the Lord. Jesus said to his disciples: “Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you.” Luke 6:26. Those who are not obedient to the Truth will hate us.

2. Indeed, we must get accustomed to the idea that we are strangers on earth. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; and in this newness of life he does not fit here in this sinful world. The river of evil will always be in flood against him. The true Church must provide for her spiritual provisions as she goes, or perish; she must carry along her weak and those who are sick in soul, without looking to the world of men for succor and relief. Just this is meant when we sing: Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God. It signifies, not earthly power, but a sentence of trial and conflict. We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God, into the heavenly Canaan. That is true of the true Church and of the individual believer.

II.

A. Now there is an adjective in that hymn which bothers us. We have seen why the Church is likened to an army. But is it not out of reason to call it a MIGHTY army? If you look at Israel, you can well admit that one could hardly imagine a nation more poorly equipped for the conflict they were facing. But the Church is an unusual army. When it marches in true formation, its power is enormous and easily discernible. We explain it in the hymn by describing this formation: With the Cross of Jesus Going on before.

1. Of course, when you look at the scene before you, you will not see any cross. What we do see is an Ark. This was the secret weapon of that mighty army; and we could never understand Israel unless we grasped the significance of it. The Bible speaks of several arks, and all of them were different. There was Noah’s ark, the enormous ship that rode the Flood. When Moses’ mother wanted to save her child from the sword of Pharaoh, we are told that she made an ark of bulrushes, a small basket-like crib, which she hid in the reeds by the river. The ark of Israel was a wooden box. When the Tabernacle was set up, this ark stood in the room known as the Holy of Holies. On the lid of the ark were figures of two angels, and between them, under their outstretched wings, was the place called the Mercy Seat. Within the box lay the two Tablets of Stone bearing the Law of God.
2. Now what was the purpose and significance of this ark? Joshua explained it to Israel, saying: Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you ... behold, the Ark of the Covenant etc. v. 11. God had made a covenant with Israel; and this ark was the sign of it. It was to Israel what the Bible is to us. It stood for the divine Truth, the revelation of God, for the way of salvation. The Tablets of Stone represented the Law; the mercy seat signified the Gospel of the gracious God. The ark spoke of Israel’s sin and of Israel’s Savior.

3. Israel was like a mighty army because it went forward behind the ark. The priests carried it on their shoulders before the people, and the people followed. They did not send their armed men ahead; they were not that kind of army. They sent their God and His Truth before them, and, like the true Church of all ages, could say: God is our refuge and strength.

B.

1. So it is with us. We use a different figure to describe our strength. We say: With the cross of Jesus going on before. But what do we mean by that? Surely we are not following a mere piece of wood. What does it say? It says: Here is your God. For here, in this cross, is represented the entire Truth. Yes, it is all there. The cross is the picture of our great and terrible sin; for it is the torture-chamber on which the Son of God suffered our punishment. It showed the wrath of God, which was upon us and which He visited upon His Only-begotten in our stead. But it also shows the mercy of God, and it is the mercy seat to which we flee. In this cross are God's promises for our salvation, the assurance of our justification. In this cross we find peace and strength. Because of this cross God foreordained us to the inheritance of the heavenly Canaan. This cross spells Jesus, and of course all that Jesus revealed unto us, his entire Gospel with all its blessed doctrines.
2. This cross we send before us, and we march behind it. Our pastors hold it aloft and turn it in the sun that we may study the brilliance of its thousand facets. We are given the Holy Word in its pure Truth to follow. And when we do, we are like a mighty army. But let us also copy Israel's wonderful way of following the emblem of their strength. To the true formation of the Church belongs the command: Eyes front

III.

A.

- 1.2. There are strange things about this first march of Israel under Joshua. They are meaningful things. We note that when it was time to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark not only went ahead; they went alone, and the people remained until they were so far behind that they could all see the ark before them in the distance. The priests alone approached the river; they alone got their feet wet. The problems that lay before them were not to be the concern of Israel. They were told to look at the ark, keep their eyes upon it, and march.
3. Why this? My dear friends, though great powers lay in wait beyond Jordan to assail God's people; though the river was in flood: the Lord did not want his people to have those things in their eyes and on their minds. They should not stare at the fortified cities of the heathen; they should not glance to right and left at the floodwaters. Their eyes were to be filled with the glory of the Lord, of His promises, of His covenant. To them, as poor, unworthy sinners, God had promised a great inheritance.

B.

1. Now when Israel marched, seeing only the ark, what happened? Oh, what strange things. First of all, the flooded Jordan just vanished. We are told that when the ark arrived over the edge of the swollen stream, the waters stood up like a wall - but not there. Far upstream it stood. Israel could not see the wall from where they stood. They could see nothing. Below, the waters ran off to the Dead Sea, and so, when they arrived at what had been the shore, there was only a plain of dry land, and there stood the priests with the ark in what had been the streambed. Past them the multitude walked safely.

2. The Lord was dealing with the obstacles as He would deal with the enemy, with the trials and dangers. They were to be no concern of Israel's. Their task was to fill their eyes with the glory of the Truth. The Truth was their assignment, nothing more.

C.

1. If only we could embrace this rule of the army of God. The true Church does not deal with difficulties. We speak of them and fear them. Sometimes we try to outmaneuver them. Will we not learn that that is not the business of the Church? God and His Holy Word, God and His Truth—these go ahead and take care of the river crossings.
2. Certainly, when we look to right and to left, we see dangers. But then we also lose sight of God's Word. Then comes the time, when we waver. We are tempted to follow relatives and friends who run for high ground, and thus stray from obedience to the Word. We try to devise ways and means to escape trials. That is not the way of the true Church. Let us keep our eyes front, on the Ark of the Covenant, on the Cross and what it stands for. Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Can He no longer do what He has so often done for His people?
3. And what is good for the Church is good for the individual Christian. Let him give thought to the distress and critical danger of Peter when he, taking his eyes off Jesus, looked at the approaching wave and began immediately to sink. He that follows the Word of God with unwavering gaze shall never be confounded. Ps. 119: 116–117.

What Mean These Stones?

Text: Joshua 4:19–24

Theme: *God's campaign plan for Israel included a monument at Gilgal.*

- I. The dangers of the campaign necessitated this monument.
- II. The monument alone effectively combated those dangers

The Outline:

- I.
 - A. The monument seems an idle exercise.
 1. What it was;
 2. How absurd it seems.
 - B. Yet God had in mind the dangers of the campaign.
 1. The awareness of the enemy
 - a. Of his helplessness;
 - b. Of his opportunity for compromise.
 2. The unawareness of Israel,
 - a. Leading them to misinterpret the weakness of the enemy as willingness to agree;
 - b. Leading them to forget their exclusive heritage and the fact that there was no possible common ground.
 - C. These dangers are the bane of the Church today:
 1. Not the strength of the world's position, as is so often assumed;
 2. But the blandishments of the disturbed enemy and his attempt at infiltration and absorption,
 3. And the gullibility of uninformed, poorly indoctrinated Christians.
- II.

- A. It is the instrument for effective indoctrination.
 - 1. A monument for inquisitive children;
 - 2. An opportunity to instruct in the might and mercy of God.
- B. This is a necessity for Israel.
 - 1. The lengthy and arduous campaign;
 - 2. The need of indoctrinated children.
- C. The Church must ever erect such monuments.
 - 1. In the vivid remembrance of the past lies the victory of the future;
 - 2. This is the thought behind the monuments of our schools;
 - 3. This is the principle of our Synodical institutions.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

In the eyes and judgment of the world, the true Church on earth does some very foolish things. If the heathen people of Canaan were watching the Children of Israel after the wonderful crossing of the Jordan River, about which we spoke last Sunday, they must have wagged their heads in wonder. For what did Israel do after they had arrived at last in Canaan? We are told: v. 8. Our text relates, then, how these stones were used to erect a monument, which Joshua dedicated at a special service. This was the first act of Israel in the Promised Land.

No other people would have done this. For Israel was now at a point of critical danger. The nation had entered enemy territory. Canaan was full of tribes who would seek to stop this invasion with all-out war. Was this not, in all common sense, the time for Israel quickly to get itself arranged to meet attack? And the way to do this —would it not have been to group the armed forces, to build fortifications? The river was behind them, and they could not retreat. How were they preparing to meet attack from the front and on the flanks? By building a monument of stones.

This does not seem to make good sense. But Israel was the true visible Church of God; and her ways make good sense if they are the ways of the Lord. That is what we are trying to learn for ourselves, for the safety of our Church. The monument was not the result of human planning. Our text makes it plain that

God's campaign plan for Israel included a monument at Gilgal.

I.

- A.
 - 1. Twelve men carried twelve huge stones, one for each tribe of Israel, out of the dry riverbed and laid them on the shore in a heap. Through these twelve men, all of Israel had a share in this monument. They all gave their approval to this divine plan. They all were to benefit from it.
 - 2. No doubt it looked silly. I suppose that the monument was a very Crude affair, nothing fancy or glossy. And we may be sure that the Canaanites and Jebusites and all the rest of the worldlings never did get the idea of it. For again we remind ourselves that the world knows only earthly weapons to meet all dangers and to afford security, while the weapons of the Church's warfare are not carnal. Who would have believed that, in the end, Israel took the Promised Land through the instrumentality of this heap of stones?
- B.
 - 1.
 - a. In commanding the people to erect this monument immediately in Gilgal, the Lord was carrying out his plans for Israel's safety and success in the face of great dangers. He alone understood those dangers - for they were not what they seemed to be. And this is so often the case in the life of the Church and of the individual Christian that the learning of our lesson

- today must be of outstanding importance for our welfare. Let us look into God's mind through the mirror of His Word. Obviously the Lord did not fear their weapons or their fortified cities. He was concerned, however, about the fear that the heathen harbored in their hearts. They dreaded the approach of Israel. Let your minds go back to the words that Rahab, the woman of Jericho, had spoken to the spies: "Your terror is fallen upon us, and all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you." The heathen had heard of the great deeds of God, and they had lost all confidence in themselves. This would have been good news to any invading army, to any general. But it was bad news for Israel.
- b. Does this sound mysterious? It is not so at all. Let us remember that this was no ordinary war. This was a war of Truth against error, of the true God against the heathen gods, of the Church for its existence in this world. There would have been no war if the heathen, knowing the Truth, had accepted it and received Israel, joined God's people. Their unbelief alone, their love for their own gods and their wickedness, made them Israel's enemy. But now they were afraid. They wanted to resist the Truth, yet they feared it. What, then, would be their best defense? It would be to meet Israel halfway, to be friendly to them, and to offer them a compromise. They would say: "Yes, come and live with us. We will give you land and homes. We can live side by side. We will respect your religion if you respect ours. No doubt you have something that we can learn, and we have things you can learn. Together we will be strong."
2.
 - a. O yes, this would have been the strongest weapon of the world, and by far the most dangerous. For it would have penetrated Israel where it was weakest. How easy it would have been to mistake the enemy's weakness for a willingness to agree. Everyone would lay down his arms - how wonderful. There would be peace. All would be friendly. "The unbelievers are coming our way, ," Israel might have said. "We have won the fight without a struggle."
 - b. But what would happen? The heathen would win. There simply cannot be any compromise between truth and error, between faith and unbelief. But if Israel lived with the heathen, the people of God would soon forget their exclusive heritage. They would forget the ways of the Lord more and more, and would adopt the ways of the heathen. Where Truth and falsehood sleep in the same bed, falsehood takes over and Truth is out. Outright warfare against the world will never hurt a true Christian Church; but compromise with the enemy will destroy it. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" James 4:4.
- C.
1. Understanding Christians will see without my pointing it out that here we behold the real danger of our Church today as well. Nothing can truly harm the Christian who retains his foundation of faith unyieldingly. "And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won: The Kingdom ours remaineth." The position of falsehood and evil in this world is indeed strong and firmly entrenched. But the Lord of the Church is greater. While the false scientist and the errorist and the god of lust storm against us, we feel secure. When the world shows its teeth, we know we are safe.
 2. But let them begin to make us an offer, and we are in trouble. That is what is going on, on several fronts of the true visible Church today. We must understand this: The world is disturbed. It has heard the Gospel, and the Truth is making it uneasy and afraid. We see many signs of this. Have you not noticed how men's hearts are failing them for fear? They have

failed, and they know not where to turn. They discover that they are raising up a generation that is getting out of hand. They see communism looming like a dark cloud. So they are trying to be friendly to those who preach the Truth. Not that they believe the Truth or want to accept it; no, they want the protection of the Truth, as the Athenians once sought the good will of “The Unknown God,” while retaining their wickedness and their falsehoods at the same time. And so, everywhere, the world and unbelief are trying to infiltrate the true Church, to absorb it and establish compromise in religious matters. The slogan that we are all basically alike in our beliefs and ought to unite against the common danger and in the common interest—that slogan is the cry of today.

3. And this appeals to the hearts of uninstructed, poorly indoctrinated Christians, to people who have little known or less remembered the Word and Works of the Lord. They learned in Sunday school that Christ is their Savior; but they learned little more. Also, they are anxious for peace. They say: “Those people aren’t so bad. They mean well. Let’s take them into the Church. Let’s take their Boy Scout system and make something of it. Let us take world religion and give it a Christian flavor.” That is also exactly what the world wants. That is compromise, and it spells death to the true visible Church. And it is categorically forbidden in the strongest terms. 2 Cor. 6:14–18. It was against this greatest of all evils that Israel erected a monument at Gilgal as a weapon in its campaign; the weapon that alone effectively combated the danger.

II.

A.

1. What, you say, did a heap of stones offer by way of protection for Israel? Let us see. Read vv. 20–24. It was, as you see, a monument for inquisitive children. It was an instrument of education.
2. The history of God’s salvation for His people was a long and grand one. It went back for hundreds of years. In that time, the Lord had revealed Himself in all His glory, by His mighty Word and Work, as the God of all the earth and the Savior of His people. The whole revelation of God to sinners was here included. And the monument at Gilgal was designed as an altar of home devotions. It would keep alive the Truth in the memory of Israel and offer opportunity for training the youth in its glorious message.

B.

1. This was the greatest necessity for Israel. The campaign for the Holy Land was to be a long and arduous one. For let us remember that it was not simply to be a war for possession of a country, but also a campaign for the hearts of the heathen. All of God’s plan for the salvation of men was involved. Canaan was to be more than a national home. It was to be the cradle of hope, the land of the promise of a sin-Savior for all. God redeemed men here in the fullness of time through His Son.
2. How shall this be accomplished unless the Truth is kept alive in the coming generations? Let the children forget, and the heathen will take over. Israel must have children of remembrance, to whom every detail of God’s knowledge is as real as it was to their fathers. The faith and fear of the Lord must remain a power in the hearts of Israel. That is why the monument of stones was more vital than sword and spear and shield, than carnal weapons, to Israel and to God. Here was the first line of defense.

C.

1. This wisdom of warfare has not changed in the least to the present time. If we do not instruct our children, we shall not conquer the land. How bitterly we must regret that the understanding for this fundamental policy is failing more and more in Christian churches. Congregations build great, costly churches and parish houses. Everything is of the finest, and the debts are huge. But only in the remembrance of the past lies the victory of the future. The great Truths of our religion lie in the past. God's mighty works, His justice and His wisdom and His mercy, are enshrined in the doctrines of His Holy Word. We cannot maintain a true Church in this world by great and costly efforts at bigness. The need is for educational monuments.
2. True, our churches are that; for here the blessed Truth is preached Sunday after Sunday. But for the questions and the hearts of our children there must be more. We have erected a Christian school in our midst. And the thought as well as the necessity behind it is the defense of the true Church. What mean these stones? The world thinks it a silly thing, a needless expense, a heap of stones erected by people of folly. Let them think so. But we know that children trained here will not so easily forget the greatness of their spiritual heritage. They will not easily be led to think that one religion is as good as another, or that we can make common cause with error.
3. This is the principle of our school, and of the institutions of our Synod as well. All the work of Synod consists actually of but two things: sending out missionaries, and maintaining schools. How grateful we should be that this campaign plan is still alive among us and is being followed. Truly, it is essential to our Church. And it should be, as it was in Israel, the project of ALL members of our spiritual household.

Captain Meets Captain

Text: Joshua 5:10–15

Theme: *Joshua meets the Captain of the Lord's Host on the battleground.*

- I. The purpose of this meeting.
- II. The consequence of this meeting.

The Outline:

- I.
 - A. To rid Joshua of a false conception of his problem.
 1. Joshua is meditating before Jericho;
 2. It is evident that he does not understand exactly who the enemy is;
 3. He learns the truth from a most remarkable reply:
 - a. The heavenly Captain does not come to deal with men as enemies;
 - b. But in the spirit of Grace, to the service of which the Host of heaven is dedicated.
 - B. Thus to protect Joshua and Israel in their exposed position.
 1. Very thin was the measure of difference between themselves and the heathen;
 2. If God dealt with them according to their sins, the sword must fall on them;
 3. How important, then, to be on God's side.
 - C. Thus helping our Church to understand.
 1. Not priding itself on a peculiar exclusiveness;
 2. Not attacking men or groups as such;
 3. But seeing its war as a struggle against evil wherever it may be found.
- II.

- A. Joshua takes refuge in Grace.
 - 1. He subjects himself to the Savior;
 - 2. He asks to be directed;
 - 3. Where this is done, the Host of heaven can pursue its purpose.
- B. Joshua gains the heart of a true warrior of God.
 - 1. He prepares to stand on the battle-ground as on holy ground dedicated, not to personal ambitions or animosities, but to the cause of God;
 - 2. He will not yield the holy ground.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

An often-told story about former President Coolidge relates that, after attending church one Sunday, he was asked what the sermon was about. Mr. Coolidge, who was not noted for talkativeness, answered: "About sin." "Well," said the questioner, "What did the preacher say about sin?" Mr. Coolidge thought for a moment, and then said briefly: "He was against it."

That was a very incomplete review of the sermon; but it served to show that the pastor had at least made it clear what he was against and, what is equally important, that he himself knew exactly what he opposed. May our Church and all its members also always understand against what they are and ought to be fighting.

The world surely does not understand. The most hateful and bitter accusation raised against our Church, particularly our Synod, is that we are against everything outside of our Church and that we regard all who teach and believe differently as our enemies. Of course this charge comes chiefly from those who oppose the Truth; but sometimes perhaps we give them cause to speak so of us, by our attitude, by the manner in which we fight for the Truth in word and deed. And perhaps that is because we ourselves are not always clear as to what we really are against.

The Lord would not allow Joshua to lead his people into battle until he knew without doubt what he was fighting. Therefore our text for today does not show us Israel advancing against the heathenism of Canaan. Instead, we are told of an hour of serious preparation.

I.

- A.
 - 1. The first critical hour for the people of Israel in Canaan draws near. As the people of God, they are to possess the land. As the people of God, they will not fail. They are the bearers of the Truth, and their success is assured. To this task, also, Israel has now dedicated itself anew, and prepared itself spiritually. For our text tells us that in their camp at Gilgal, on the plains of Jericho, the people had solemnly observed the great feast of the Passover. How full was the spirit of Joshua, as a result of this blessed celebration, when he stood alone that day, under the shadow of the walls of the heathen city of Jericho, thinking of the battle to come. In memory of the night so many years ago, in which God had delivered Israel at last from Egypt and saved them from the angel of death, Joshua and his people had eaten the feast of the lamb. Each family, in its tent, with the blood of the lamb painted somehow on the entrance of the tent, had eaten of its flesh. This feast was the sign of God's covenant with them and of their covenant with God. Here Israel confessed its faith in the coming Redeemer, in the glorious promises of salvation. Here God strengthened and increased their faith. Surely nothing could better have prepared Israel to go forward, now, with courage and zeal, carrying the banner of the God of salvation into a heathen country.
 - 2. No one can doubt that Joshua and Israel understood the Truth and were devoted to it. Yet the Lord does not at once send them on their mission - for while they know for what they are to

fight, they must yet learn exactly against whom they are to fight. They must clearly understand who the enemy is. We note that Joshua has already made up his mind about that; and he must discover that he is mistaken. His thoughts as he stands looking the city of Jericho over are plainly revealed. He is thinking of the people in that city, of its king and its soldiers, as the enemy he must destroy. He is planning a war after the flesh, a fight against people. And therefore, when suddenly he sees a man standing between him and Jericho, with a gleaming sword in hand, he walks up to him and asks him to identify himself. But Joshua does not ask: Art thou for the Truth or against the Truth? He reveals his way of thinking by demanding: “Art thou for us or for our adversaries?” Depending upon the answer, Joshua will do one of two things: he will embrace the man as a friend or draw his sword and have it out with him, on the spot.

3.

- a. But Joshua does neither - for he receives an answer that leaves him momentarily helpless. The man with the sword replies: NAY. “No.” Well, no what? What kind of answer is that to the question? He says, “No,” simply because Joshua is trying to make him be against men, against a certain nation and people. But this man is not against men or against a certain group of them. Nor did he come to deal with men as with enemies. And this is the One under whom Joshua is to lead Israel in their campaign - for He proclaims His title as Joshua’s Commander-in-Chief. He is the Head of Israel, the Ruler of the Kingdom, the Supreme Defender of the Truth. This is the Lord Who appears here, the eternal Son of God Who in the fullness of time was made flesh and then was called Jesus. He is the One to Whom, and by Whom, and for Whom are all things. He is the Savior-God.
- b. But he chooses none of these names in identifying Himself to Joshua. Instead, He says: “As captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.” He commands the heavenly army of God, the holy angels, and appears in the cause for which this army was created. And though they fight for God, they seek not to destroy men, but to save them. It is written of this host that it does God’s commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word. But that Word is a word of Grace unto men; and the host of heaven is filled with the spirit of grace and love toward all men. They are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation. When a sinner repents and turns from his evil way, these are the first to rejoice, these heavenly warriors. When sinners are lost because of their willful hearts, the angels weep and mourn. They fight for the Grace of God; and this Grace seeks the welfare of all men.

Are the men of Jericho the adversaries of the Captain of the Host? His heart loves them as it loves Israel. His shining sword is drawn, not against men, but against Satan and his kingdom. If it strikes men, if it destroys them, it is because they have chosen the service of sin and unbelief and have despised Grace. For this reason the sword will kill most of the inhabitants of Jericho. But it had also at times struck some in Israel. God must destroy those whom He loves, for whom His Son bled and died. For they have made themselves His adversaries - and they have refused to be reconciled to Him.

B.

1. If Joshua is to lead Israel into battle on the side of God, he must do so in the spirit of the Captain of the Host of Heaven, with hatred for sin and love for the sinner. There must be no partisan spirit of pride and self-righteousness. After all, why was God with Israel? Because He loved them and hated other men? Indeed, the measure of difference between Israel and Jericho was very thin. God had just reminded them of this in a forceful way: our text says that the

manna from heaven with which God had fed His people in the wilderness had ceased to come. Israel had to live on the corn of Canaan now, just as did the people of Jericho. This nation was of itself no better than any other nation. It was not by their deserving that God had put His love upon them, performed miracles for them. They were no better, no different brand of men than any others.

2. All that had happened to them had been a miracle. For if the Lord had taken them as they were by nature, to deal with them according to their sins, Joshua would not be here now to ask on which side the Captain's sword was. He and all his nation would long since have been dead by that same sword.
3. The question was not whether God was on their side, but whether they would be on God's side, faithful to the Truth and concerned with the welfare and salvation of men. Would they fight with the heart of God and His angels?

C.

1. It is by this test that our Church must ever prove itself as a true Church of the Gospel. We are accused of enmity against others. May it never be a true charge. There is grave danger that we pride ourselves in a certain exclusiveness - that we fight for the Truth without concern for the souls of men. It is necessary, then, to remind ourselves that we are eating from the same ground, as are all other men; that we are of the earth, which is accursed because of sin; that we have no priority on God or on the Truth because of any merit on our part. No peculiar manna falls for us, God does not value us because we stem from Dr. Luther, or Dr. Walther, or Dr. Hoenecke. God treasures us because he treasures all men. "All are redeemed, both far and wide, Since thou, O Lord, for all hast died." All were God's enemies, but God was their friend through His Son, and still is. How blessed and fortunate are they who are faithful to the Lord by the power of His Grace.
2. Now we are called to bear witness to the Truth, to fight on the side of the Host of God, which hearkens unto the voice of His Word. Let us not regard ourselves as enemies of men, or fight as though we were. Let us not hate or despise, but love and pity.
3. For our war is a struggle against sin and error, against evil wherever it may be found, whether in the Wisconsin Synod or in any other church. We must stand by the Truth because it alone saves souls. If men oppose this Truth, they destroy themselves. But let us remember that it is not our calling to destroy them. We must not join them in their sins, but we fight to win them from their errors. The Captain meets us here today to give us the hearts of true warriors of God.

II.

A.

1. May the fruits of this meeting be found among us as we see them in Joshua. For surely we seek with all our heart to be on the side of Heaven's Host. As we hope to be numbered among those who in eternity will lift their voices with the angels, archangels and all the company of heaven, so each of us desires to be a true soldier of their Captain. Observe, then, the results of Joshua's meeting with Him.

v. 14b. We may well believe that Joshua was stricken with awe when he found himself to be in the presence of the Lord of Hosts. At first, there had been the fear that he faced an enemy. But now he found more than a friend, and a sword is pointed, it seems, at him. This

made Joshua forget Jericho, forget all his plans, forget even that he himself held a high and holy office. It brought him low to the ground. Even as Peter, when he looked at the miracle-working Jesus sitting by him in the little boat, fell down stricken by his conscience and said: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,” so Joshua was overwhelmed by a deep sense of his unworthiness and his personal guilt. The sword glittered as though it must strike him to the heart. At the same time, he realized that he was still alive only because this was the Captain of Divine Grace. Therefore he does not run away, but puts himself completely into the Lord’s hands. It was as though he had miraculously escaped death, and owed it all to this Heavenly Captain. And that was indeed true. It is true of us all. The sword of God’s Law and its wrath hangs over us every moment, and is held up only by the Hand of Him Who loves us. We are the humblest servants; we owe all that we have or hope to have to the Lord in Whose service we stand.

2. How that must humble us, as it did Joshua. He casts aside his rank and asks only to be directed. He will not have a will of his own, but to do what his Captain, his Savior, wills.
3. Dear Friends, when we begin each day in our calling as warriors for the Truth in this spirit, then our warfare will be right indeed. Then through us the cause of the Host of Heaven will become a saving work. Then we will not attack men, but the Old Evil Foe who enslaves them; we will not hate men, but their error; we will not thank God that we are not as other men, but confess in sympathy for them that we, too, are unworthy, and that we seek only their good.

B.

1. But Joshua at the same time came to learn with new intensity of understanding that the battleground on which he stood, in the struggle for the Truth, was holy ground v. 15. Joshua and Israel were not fighting for themselves or for selfish interests. Their cause was God’s, and they must treat it as though it were God’s. It was a holy thing, this Truth for which they stood, and they must revere it. If they were not worthy to be entrusted with it, certainly then they must not fight carelessly or cowardly. They knew that some people would get hurt in this struggle; but they could not hold back for that reason. Friends they must be of all men; yet not false friends. He is a false friend who, for the sake of peace, denies or corrupts the Truth.
2. Joshua cannot surrender holy ground. Our Church stands on holy ground. We must stand in awe of the Word. We know that those who oppose the rock of their salvation will find it at last rolling on them and grinding them to powder. If, then, we must attack men and their works for the sake of the Truth, we shall do so in humility, in sorrow, but without yielding or giving ground. For the Gospel ground is sacred. It must ever stand and be defended, so that some may be saved.

Battle Noises

Text: Joshua 6:12&–21

Theme: *The peculiar noises of Israel’s battle with Jericho.*

- I. Discordant, yet harmonious unto the Lord.
- II. Ridiculous, yet sweet and logical in some human ears.
- III. Terrible, yet precious in the service of the Truth.

The Outline:

- I.

- A. Not musical.
 - 1. Israel makes noise;
 - 2. To the human ear unpleasing.
 - B. Yet harmonious.
 - 1. As directed;
 - 2. When directed.
 - C. So must the battle-noise of the Church ever be.
 - 1. Much noise does not establish the vigor of a church body;
 - 2. But orderly noise is harmonious.
- II.
- A. The inhabitants of Jericho must have jeered.
 - 1. The procedure was absurd;
 - 2. Ineffective in its very nature;
 - 3. This is the charge raised against the battle technique of a true Church.
 - B. Consider, however, the sweetness of such noise in some ears.
 - 1. Think of what it meant to Rahab;
 - 2. So in the ears of troubled souls today.
- III.
- A. Terrible in its effect.
 - B. Yet precious in its service.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

For some time, now, we have been expecting at any moment to hear the sound of warfare in the land of Canaan as the people of Israel move forward under the leadership of Joshua to deal with the heathen inhabitants. That moment has now come. It came when Israel was prepared - not in fleshly power and might, but in spirit. As we heard last Sunday, God's people must learn that they are fighting on the side of Heaven's Host, of the angels, and under the banner of that great Captain, the eternal Son of God, Who is the King of angels and Who loves all the children of men. When this great Leader brings His people forth to war, certainly it will be a strange war. And so we notice immediately, as the struggle begins, that such is the case.

The story of Israel's conquest of Jericho is famous and widely acclaimed. It is said: Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down. Unfortunately, there are few who actually appreciate how valuable the record of this battle is for our learning, to the end that we might understand the true character of the struggle of the Church of Christ today. The letter to the Hebrews declares: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after that they were compassed about seven days." (Heb. 11:30). This is not apparent to human eyes. We do not see faith; we cannot see it. All we hear is noise. But it was the noise of the Church of the Lord, the sound that true faith makes and whereby it shatters the empire of Satan.

I.

- A.
 - 1. It was a strange sight that assailed the eyes and a strange sound that racked the ears of men as Israel attacked Jericho. The sight was strange - for against the huge walls of the city no assault troops moved, and there was no charge of armed forces. Only about a million people, fathers, mothers and children, surrounded Jericho like families out for a holiday. The sound was even more peculiar. There was music. That is not unusual. In battle, trumpets sound the charge; bands play stirring marches that quicken men's blood. But Israel just made noise. Seven priests with seven trumpets made from the horns of rams blew them steadily on a procession all the

way around the walls of the city; blew them thus every day for six days; blew them continuously on the seventh day while making seven trips around the city. After that, a million people shouted, all at once, together.

2. We can readily conclude what this was like. It was very unpleasant and altogether irritating to the ears of men. Such ears can appreciate music, good harmony, tones soft and loud. Even the shout of a multitude can be stirring. But this constant tooting on one note, this beginning nowhere and ending nowhere, and finally this disorganized yelling of voices, must have offended the ears of the people of Jericho. If it carried a message, that message seemed far beyond their understanding. Men must call this voice of God's people ugly and disgusting.

B.

1. But how differently it sounded to God - how harmonious and beautiful. For it was the voice of faith. The Lord is not tuned in on our earthly harmonies. Choirs may sing melodious anthems, but the chords do not have the musical qualities of heaven. God does not hear them as we hear them. Rather, He perceives in them the overtones of faith, and if those are lacking in human voices, the loveliest hymns are an aching pain in His ears. The noise of Israel's battle was beautiful in heaven because it was the song of faith. For Israel made noise as directed. These were the notes selected by God's Word and Command. They did not appeal to Israel's fleshly taste, either, and they did not seem a very effective weapon of warfare against a walled city; but God had said: This is the noise I want; and so that was the noise that Israel made. They believed and obeyed.
2. Moreover, they made noise at the right time. The Lord had said: v. 10. How easy and tempting it must have been to improve a little on God's methods; to get in a few extra shouts in advance just for good measure, or add an occasional countermelody to the horns. But this would have destroyed the harmony. Faith makes the noise that the Lord desires when He desires it. And that is always the mysterious secret of success in the Church's warfare against evil.

C.

1. A profound truth is this, and a lesson. We find that the true measure of a church's vigor does not lie in how much noise it can make or how beautiful it sounds in human ears. We observe that some church bodies in our day beat their drums and blow their horns in great style; and by general agreement it sounds good. They call it witnessing for the Lord. They sound off in every direction and by every means, shouting pious phrases and prayers. No subject is safe from them—politics, farm programs, or scientific sociology. Thus they presume to do battle against evil. But theirs is not the voice of faith, for they do not make the noise that God expressly commands His Church to make. And we must well understand that a noisy church is not in itself a true church. Nor is the service of God accomplished only or especially when a church has a lovely organ and a robed choir. We are mindful of the scorn with which the Lord addressed Israel through the prophet Amos in later days, after Israel had forsaken the covenant of faith and become an apostate church going through the motions of worship. God said: "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." (Amos 5:23). The tones of real churchly beauty are not audible to earthly ears.
2. They are the tones of faith, by which the Church as with one mouth glorifies God. As the horns of rams sounded forth but one note, so the Church has but one message and must rely upon it. There are no variations when the Church sounds forth what God has said and commanded. Seven days a week, the very same tone, the Truth, the blessed Gospel doctrines of salvation

through the blood of Jesus, of justification by faith alone; in one day of seven, the same united shouting at the signal, the joint confessing of one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism—that, and only that, is the sound of the Church at war.

II.

- A. We observe, in the second place, that the noise of Israel's battle with Jericho was peculiar in that it sounded ridiculous, yet sweet in the ears of some people.
1. The monotonous trumpeting of the priests not only disgusted the ears of Jericho; we may well reflect also that the noise was ridiculous. This was an attack which Jericho had been fearing all along; and certainly it was to be expected that there would be noise—a clashing of swords, a crashing of battering rams against the stout gate of the city, a whistling of arrows, and perhaps the crackling of flames. But now Jericho is treated to the endless blowing of horns. There have been many weapons invented for the use of human warfare; and some are extremely noisy, deafening. But Israel has come up with something new. It is trying to defeat Jericho with sound. Was this not absurd?
 2. After recovering from their first feeling of uneasy, superstitious fear, it would not be surprising if the men of Jericho soon made sport of the whole thing. We might imagine that sometime on the second day they climbed on the top of their walls and mockingly kept time to the music, hurling insults at the Church of God. For no one believes that such warfare can accomplish anything.
 3. Do you not suppose that the people of Israel were greatly tempted to be ashamed of their performance? Was it not hard to continue day after day sounding off on that one note? So is the Church always tempted, as the world also ridicules her. The greatest burden we bear in our Lord's service is that we are always sounding the same tone and have nothing else. Again and again, we assault the stronghold of Satan with the Gospel. And Satan's walled empire seems to grow stronger and stronger, more sure of itself, more open in its contempt. Are we making even a dent in its walls proclaiming over and over the foolishness of the Gospel, with its central Truth that by God all men have been declared righteous through the blood of Christ, that he who believes this shall be saved? Are we winning with a thing called Baptism, a sprinkling of water? Or what we call a feast of the body and blood of Christ? That is all we know—Christ and Him crucified. And it is to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness.
- B.
1. But now let us regard the hidden beauty of Israel's horns. Let us remember those few stricken but believing hearts inside that walled city. Let us think of that woman Rahab, and of her family. What a handful in the large metropolis. But how do you think Israel's noise sounded in THEIR ears? Was it not the very sweetest melody? Rahab shared the faith of Israel; her heart beat with that of God's people. Captive in the evil city, she longed for deliverance; and that is what the horns said to her and her household. It was the trumpet-call of freedom, the voice of God, the harbinger of hope. Those whom God has chosen and called will He also gather and glorify.
 2. My dear friends, that is what the true noise of the Church comes to mean to many thousands in this evil world. Nothing is more wonderfully sweet than the simple Truth, the only Truth, of God's love. Therefore we ought to be ashamed to sound forth anything else. We know how

much our testimony is spoken against. We know that the great majority will reject it. But we know that our noise is the savor of life, and that all other sound is death. For when the Church ceases to shout, then death strikes.

III.

- A. You know and remember the conclusion of this story. Is it not terrible, what Israel's noise did? It laid the city of Jericho open to the destructive judgment of Almighty God. Without warning, by no process understood by the mind of man, the combined tone of the trumpets and the shout of the Church brought the walls down. They fell outward, leaving the multitudes completely exposed. They were as naked before the assault that followed. God in the Old Testament days used His nation also as a police power, and Israel bore the sword of divine government. This is not the case in our New Testament Church. In our age, God has established governments outside of the Church, and handed the sword to them. Today the Church does not execute divine judgments with carnal weapons. But the Church still brings the walls down. The men, women and children of Jericho died; their livestock died. It was like the visitation of the Flood to them. And this was the consequence of Israel's faith and Israel's message. It brought death and horror. Some people are disturbed by this. They even dare to speak of God's "cruelty."

Do they not know that the message of the Church destroys as surely as it saves? Let us hear what God commanded Israel through Moses before his death, Deut. 7:1–12. Shall we forget that our commission as servants of God includes a similar duty? If a church declares the Truth: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," it is a false church unless it adds: "He that believeth not shall be damned." If it is the privilege of the Church to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, it is no less her duty to retain the sins of the impenitent. That means to lock heaven; and that means to commit to hell. Is there a worse destruction than that? Yes, the noise of the Church is terrible. Impenitent sinners and offenders cannot stand before it. The Gospel at last pulls down the walls of unbelief and hands the sinner over to the sword of wrath.

- B. Despite this, Israel's battle noise, the noise of the true Church, is very precious. It unites Rahab with the Church. It brings out every single soul that accepts the simple Truth of redemption, and gives to it Life. But it serves the Truth also when it destroys. The justice of God must be glorified as well as His mercy. His gracious promise is no greater than His warning. The truth about heaven is as true as the truth about damnation. Let sinners take warning, let fearful hearts take courage, when the noise of God's Israel is heard. May it call our own hearts to daily repentance. May all mark the time of their visitation.

Blunted Weapons

Text: Joshua 7:2–12

Theme: *The sin that blunts the weapons of God's Church.*

- I. What this sin is.
- II. How it affects the Church.
- III. How the Church must deal with it.

The Outline:

- I.
 - A. The great sin above all sins.
 1. Sinfulness alone was not the cause of disaster in Israel;
 2. But the great sin of Achan was.

- B. How this sin manifests itself in the Church today.
 1. There is much sinfulness in its members;
 2. But the great sin also appears in various forms.
- II.
 - A. It renders Israel vulnerable to attack and defeat.
 1. This is demonstrated in Israel's experience;
 2. It is explained by the nature of that sin;
 3. We therefore have warnings against it.
 - B. It immediately begins to infect others.
 1. Joshua seems to have caught it;
 2. Such symptoms may appear among us.
- III.
 - A. The Church must look for it.
 1. Note God's impatience with Joshua;
 2. Note that God does not identify the trouble spot.
 - B. The Church must eradicate the infection.
 1. By self-examination;
 2. By discipline of the body.

The Sermon:

Introductory:

You may hear the Church sing songs of victory in remembrance of the battle of Jericho; and well may the Church sing of this, for here its weapons were tested and found to be, as the Scriptures say: "Mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Before the united voice of Israel the walls of Jericho fell, and unbelief was overwhelmed.

But you never hear the Church sing about the battle of Ai, which followed immediately after. For here the weapons of the Church seemed suddenly to have lost their edge and the strength of Israel became as nothing. Something had gone wrong; and it is our task to see what this was. We cannot rest until we know. We cannot afford to leave Israel in the ruins of Jericho without realizing how near Israel came to ruin even in the very hour of success. For what happened to Israel can happen to us. The Apostle admonishes us, saying: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." This applies, not only to the individual Christian, but to our congregation and Synod as well.

Therefore we shall close our series of studies in the Book of Joshua today on a somber note. The divine Truth that our Church bears and proclaims is the weapon which will win victories over Satan's Kingdom, so long as we fight at the side of Him Who came expressly in order that He might destroy the works of the Devil. But there is that which can separate us from His side; and then we shall be carrying a sword without an edge.

I.

- A.
 1. "Israel hath sinned." Those were the dread words of explanation from the mouth of God Himself that smote the ears of Joshua as he lay bewailing the shameful and mysterious defeat of Israel at Ai. But we ask: Had Israel not also sinned before the victory at Jericho? Indeed - Israel sinned every day, and Joshua also. For "is there a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not?" So long as God deals with His people here on earth, he deals with sinful men, women, and children. They are weak, afflicted with Adam's nature, and offend against the Lord's precepts. Daily they seek God's pardon; daily they confess their sins with the sincere purpose of amending their sinful life. Surely it was not surprising that Israel should have been guilty of sin; but if the Lord did not cover and heal those sins in mercy, how could Israel ever

win any victory or inherit God's promises? It was not Israel's sinfulness that caused the setback at Ai.

2. God is speaking about a very particular sin, a great sin above all other sins that lay upon Israel unconfessed and unremoved. The Lord describes it: v. 11. In our Bible Story books this wickedness is called the sin of Achan - for it was Achan, an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, who had personally committed the offense. At his trial a few days later, Achan confessed with the words: vv. 20–21. Our hearers will recall the command God gave Israel concerning the loot they would find in Jericho when it fell. His words were in our text last Sunday: vv. 18–19. Achan, then, was a thief who stole from God. But actually his sin was far more than that. God called it a transgression of His covenant, a breaking of the wonderful contract that tied Israel to Him. Let us look into Achan's sin a little more closely.

Confessing his sin later, Achan said: "I coveted." Now let us call to mind what the Word of God says about the sin of covetousness. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor COVETOUS MAN, WHO IS AN IDOLATER, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (5:5) We see, then, that a covetous man is an idolater, and covetousness is idolatry. This agrees also with the punishment that Achan received; for he was stoned to death, as the Old Testament civil law required when an Israelite worshipped other gods.

In this light we must see Achan's sin. When a man takes for himself that which God has clearly and distinctly marked as His own, he has taken God from His Throne and put himself in God's place. Just so, Adam once desired to be like God, and therefore took of that fruit which God had forbidden. Thus Paradise was lost - fellowship with God was broken. Achan had taken the stripes of rank off the Captain of Israel and sewed them on his own sleeve. He took for himself the privileges that belonged only to God. And this sin began in the heart. It was more than money-hunger or greed; it was rebellion against God, and unbelief. God had promised blessed Canaan to Israel, and Achan was to have his full share. But Achan broke with God; he wanted wealth and honor, not as a gift of God, but as his right. Both God's Law and God's Gospel, therefore, were set aside by this sin of covetousness. Where it enters, the victorious union between God and His people ends.

B.

1. And this sin can destroy the true hopes of God's people today. There is no question that those who are members of the Church in our midst are weak and sinful. We are not fit to handle the wonderful weapons that God has placed into our hands. Despite that, however, we are strong, as the Apostle Paul was. For by the grace of God we are what we are: redeemed by the blood of Jesus, preserved in the true faith, led to daily repentance and pardoned. We are often bound by our own weaknesses; but the Word of God is not bound. It is mighty through us as we declare the covenant of peace to men.
2. But beware of the sin of Achan. It creeps like a wolf about the camp of God's Israel seeking a heart to enter. It manifests itself in many forms, but its nature is always the same. It wants to replace God, to assign God's rights to another master. This lust, then, works to set aside God's Word, to change His instructions, to alter His Law and His Gospel. A Christian appears who is not satisfied with God's Word. He is not content with what God has given him. He is not satisfied with God's covenant. He wants to change the rules and the words and the principles. He wants rewards that are not due him. He takes away from God the right to make doctrine, and makes his own. He takes away from God His right to rule, and makes his own rules.

When we no longer concern ourselves with God's threats and no longer trust God's promises, it is because we have shifted loyalties to another master. And no matter who that master

is—whether it be self, or a relative, or a church, or gold—it is an idol. The covenant with God is broken. We have become heathen, though we may still outwardly belong to a true visible church of Christ. We have surrendered our share in Canaan. This sin, however, does not affect only the person who submits to it. Our text shows that it affects the entire body to which such a one is joined.

II.

A.

1. It was Achan and his family who had trampled God’s covenant. But all Israel felt it, as our text sufficiently shows. The city of Ai was considerably smaller than Jericho; so small, in fact, that Joshua allowed the people to remain camped in comfort while he took only three thousand men with him to deal with Ai. It was in the bag. The world would say: Israel was defeated by overconfidence. It was indeed a shameful, humiliating defeat that was suffered at the cost of 36 lives. But the reason was not overconfidence. Israel’s strength was gone. As we have often shown, this strength lay not in numbers, nor in arms; it lay in the united possession of the saving Truth, to which God had called this nation. But the sin of Achan, the sin of idolatry, rendered the entire nation vulnerable to attack and open to defeat.
2. Thus we learn more about the nature of that sin. You have noticed that God never calls it the sin of Achan. He declared: “Israel hath sinned;” and it was God who traced the defeat at Ai directly to that sin: v. 12. How could God tell us more plainly that idolatry committed and persisted in by a member of the visible church body never remains the sin of that one member, but brings a curse upon all?

You know that the Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians that among true Christians there is a divinely created unity like the unity of the human body that has many members. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.” (1 Cor. 12:13, 26.) Thus also in a true visible church, which is a reflection of the holy invisible communion of believers, this rule applies. Here there must be a unity also, a unity of doctrine and life, a unity of confession which acknowledges no higher authority than that of God and His Word. One man like Achan destroys this unity and lays the work of that church open to defeat.

3. Against such association with idolaters the New Testament warns us strictly. We are told not to be partakers of other men’s sins; and John advises the Church in this regard: 2 John 8–11. Cf. also 2 Cor. 6:14–18.

B.

1. For the sin of Achan does not stand still - it marches, grows, and increases. Like a cancer it threatens the integrity and loyalty of the whole body. We have a vivid demonstration of this in our text. After the defeat at Ai Joshua despairingly falls down before the Ark of the Covenant, together with the elders of each tribe, and bewails the sudden reversal of Israel’s fortunes. And when we listen to his prayer, we hardly know what to say. Is this Joshua, the captain of the Lord? How do we hear him, then, uttering shameful words, wishing Israel had remained on the other side of Jordan, blaming God for the defeat, accusing Him of violating His covenant? Why, Joshua has caught the virulent disease. Already he is infected by the spirit of unbelief that Achan brought into the church. Yes, that is how idolatry works among God’s people; even before we know that it is there, it runs like a prairie fire.

2. That spirit will soon be felt among us if we have living in our fellowship those who undermine the authority of God's Holy Word. Then we shall notice our church failing in its purpose, suffering defeats where there should be victories. And we will find the feeling of fear and defeatism in our own hearts. Our weapon, the blessed Word, will be blunted in our hands. Then there is but one thing to do.

III.

A.

1. Achan was very sly and crafty. Such renegades always are. They do not flaunt their rebellion, but hide and disguise it. It appears that Joshua had no knowledge of the offense that brought a curse on all Israel. But we also note that God does not excuse Joshua for this ignorance. Rather, he rebukes him sharply: v. 10. To be sure, Joshua deserved such sharp words, for his offensive prayer alone. He was giving room in his heart to the same sin.
2. But the Lord does not even tell him where to locate the source of infection. He merely commands Joshua to get rid of it, to cut the festering boil out of Israel. For that is the only cure and help. The accursed thing must be destroyed. To tolerate the evil of Achan in the Church is to rob the people of their hope and their inheritance. But Joshua must get busy and find the evil. He must look for it, not in God but in his nation, by careful examination and probing. Let him sound the alarm; let him gather Israel together. All true and faithful believers must unite to locate the trouble spot and then follow the Word of God in ridding themselves of the false and pernicious brother.

B.

1. As it is our hope that our church will stand, in its glorious calling, firm in Christ our Savior, against all the assaults of Satan, let us resolve to take such steps against the falling away that is prophesied for the latter days. Within our fellowship, we are our brother's keepers. Constant self-examination is the key to spiritual health among us. We must probe our own hearts continually, looking for the first appearance of that sin which will destroy us all unless it is checked—the sin of dethroning God and His Word. To test ourselves daily to see whether we are walking in the covenant of the Lord and to keep watch on one another—that is a serious obligation. Let no Christian among us say to another: “What I do is none of your business.” We have a calling together; we are living by the same mercy and we depend upon the same Word of God.
2. And if Achan should appear in our midst: that is, if his sin is found, there must be discipline. Take away the accursed thing from among you. We cannot and dare not tolerate anyone who persists in going his own way, whether in doctrine or in life. This is a principle of self-preservation that, if ignored, will bring our church into judgment before Ai.