

A Second Chance in Ai

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- [0 : 00] Well, because we're in a broken world, as we've been reminded of this morning, the history of our world is very much the history of conflict, the history of war.
- That is what has shaped the world today, as it is the borders, the politics, the countries, the nations that we have are shaped by war. Unfortunately, that is a fact of life.
- There are wars being fought right now. There have been wars being fought ever since day one. Because we live in a world where we can't help but fight each other.
- And as I grew up, I actually became quite interested in reading about the history of wars and just how they shaped our world. But also reading the men who fought these wars and the women sometimes.
- But the great generals and the great strategists. There seems to be some people who are just really gifted at the art of war.
- [0 : 58] And we've seen examples of them. You know, Napoleon, Alexander the Great, these kind of Genghis Khan, these kind of men. And I was always fascinated growing up, reading the tactics that were used and looking at some of the clever tactics that these generals used in order to defeat their enemies.
- And the passage that we're looking at this morning is also fascinating from a military point of view. Because it's a strange one in that amongst all the battles that are spoken about in Joshua, this one describes in detail the tactics that were used.
- If you were listening, you would have picked that up. It tells us the positioning of the troops and the timing of the battle and the timing of the movement of the troops. It's very interesting. And it begs the question, why?
- Why so much detail about a battle? Why does God want us to know about all the strategies that we use and the tactics that we use? It is, in fact, one of the most detailed tactical descriptions of a battle, not only in the Bible, but in any ancient text.
- So we've got to ask why. Why are we reading about these tactics here in Joshua 8? Now, just to give you context of the book of Joshua, if you haven't been with us and if you weren't with us last year where we started the book of Joshua, the book tells us the story of God's people, the Israelites, conquering the promised land, the land that God had reserved for them, where he was going to start his new holy kingdom.
- [2 : 24] And it teaches us, therefore, how the nation of Israel came about, how it was formed. But not only that, the book of Joshua and the battles that we read also foreshadow the great spiritual battles that God's people face in every age as we head towards our promised land, which is the new creation in eternity one day, because we will face battles like we saw last week.
- And we need to be prepared for them. And the book of Joshua really helps us to do that. And it helps us to know how we're to fight the battles that we're going to face as we head towards eternity. And so it's not for no reason that the Bible speaks about these battles and goes into so much detail about this particular battle.

There's something that God wants us to learn from this battle this morning. And so what I'm going to do, just to start, is I'm going to go through this battle bit by bit, strategy by strategy, so you know exactly what went on, so that we can discover what God is saying to us through it.

Now, we don't have a screen, do we, to show this? We've got a borrowed computer at the back, but we're not going to use it. So you've just got to listen to me. You can keep Joshua 8 open in front of you, but it is quite complex and there's quite a lot to read.

So I'm going to take you through a short version. And I had a very cool map with all the strategies and tactics and the battles and the positioning and arrows and stuff.

[3 : 44] And I worked on it for so long this morning. But anyway, so I want you to picture it in your mind. Okay, so the troops of Joshua are at Jericho. They've crossed the Jordan River.

They've entered the land. They've conquered Jericho. We read about that in chapter 6 and 7. And 5, 5 and 6 and 7 was the conquest. And then more to the west of Jericho was this place called Ai or Ai.

It was up in the hills. And they had already tried to conquer it. They had advanced with a small force. And they'd been defeated. And they'd run back to Jericho, to the east.

But then God tells them to try again. And this time he tells them that he's got a plan. And the plan is that Joshua, the plan that Joshua used was during the night he selected a group of basically Israelite special forces.

His most mighty warriors, the people most skilled in battle. And he sent them overnight, before they advanced to the city, he sent this force overnight to the south of Ai.

[4 : 54] To the south of the city. You're all picturing this in your mind? The maps there? All the troops? Okay, good. So he sent these troops. And they're there in the pitch darkness in the middle of the night. And they settle in in a valley just to the south of Ai, out of view of the city.

So they're sitting there, this force. Nobody knows that they're there. And then in the morning, Joshua takes the rest of his army and marches to the other side of the city, to the north. And sets up there and waves at the enemy on the walls and is very visible.

And so the enemy is concentrating all on Joshua and his forces. And now, if you know what happened at the last battle, this is exactly what Joshua did at the last battle. And the king of Ai went out to engage him.

And they whipped them. They whipped the Israelites. And they chased them away. And so the king of Ai thinks, well, I can do this again. I did it last time. I can do it again. So that's exactly what he does. Not only does he open the gates and bring out all his troops, but he also calls troops from Bethel, which is a fortress, more to the east.

And they empty the city and the fortress of troops to engage Joshua and his army. And Joshua runs away to the east. And they chase Joshua. But they've left the gates of their city wide open.

[5 : 59] And so while they're chasing Joshua and Joshua's pretending to be all scared and running away, the special forces who were in the valley overnight now enter the city. And they put it to the torch.

And they burn the whole city down. And the troops of Ai then look back. They see their city burning. And Joshua turns his troops around. They attack the front of the enemy.

And the ambush force that was in the city go and attack the back of the enemy, crushing it and destroying it. And so that was the strategy. And by all accounts, it was a brilliant tactic that won this battle of Ai.

It was a brilliant move. And it showed just what an accomplished commander Joshua was. It deserves a place in the great battles of history. Except for the fact that if we read carefully, we'll realize that this is no ordinary battle.

This is not just a normal battle with normal tactics being used, even though it looks that way. Because what we read is that it wasn't all Joshua that was responsible for winning this battle.

[7 : 06] Because there were some parts I left out in that description. And that is the role that God played. God played a very important role in this battle, which we need to understand this morning.

You see, the whole idea of this ambush, which won the battle, was God's idea. Look at the end of verse 2 in Joshua 8. God, almost as an afterthought, after he tells Joshua what he's going to do and what's going to happen, he says, oh, by the way, set an ambush behind the city.

That was God's idea. So Joshua then, he was the tactician. He put all the tactics together, but he based his tactics on that one command from God. God's initiative to do that strategy, which won the battle.

God also, you'll notice, determined the correct time to spring the trap. Now, what happened here, this ambush, which defeated the army of Ai, was actually a very risky strategy to use, especially back then, because it all needed precise timing.

If they had sprung that trap too early, the army of Ai would have turned back on the small force without them being able to get into the city and destroyed them.

[8 : 17] If they had sprung the trap too late, then the main force would have been too far away to turn around and help the ambush force. And so they had to synchronize the timing of this trap perfectly.

And remember, this was the ancient world. They had no watches they could synchronize. They had no radios that they could use. It's not like, you know, you see action movies today with special forces.

And before the mission, you know, they all set their watches and they synchronize it. And they go, you know, T minus now. And then they talk on their radios and they synchronize all the time. And that's how modern battles are fought and won, with perfectly synchronized timing.

But back then, they didn't have anything like that. And they needed precise timing to pull this off. And what we read is the reason why it worked is because God sprung the trap. He knew the timing.

He told Joshua just when to raise his javelin. So look at verse 18. Then the Lord said to Joshua, at that point, as they were running away, it's the Lord who then said to Joshua directly, Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand.

[9 : 19] For into your hand I will deliver the city. So Joshua held out toward the city the javelin that was in his hand. And as soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire.

And so this victory was as much God's victory as it was Joshua's victory. Because while Joshua organized the troops and gave the orders and decided on the precise tactics to use, God was actually the one behind it all.

Do you see that this morning? That's the first thing you really got to understand about this battle of Ai. And the reason this battle is recorded in your Bible is not so much to direct your attention towards Joshua, great general as he was.

It's to direct your attention towards God. It's meant to teach you something very important about God. And to teach you how you are to fight the battles you face on your way to eternity.

And there's three truths about God I want us to briefly see that we learn from this battle. And to help you remember, they all start with the letter P. My previous boss would be very proud because all of his sermons, all of his points started with the same letter.

[10 : 26] But it helps you to remember. So the three truths that we learn about God from this battle that we're going to apply to our lives are God's promises, God's power, and God's punishment.

I want you to remember those three things. So firstly, God's promises. Now, what we're meant to notice about this second battle of Ai is firstly how much it contrasts to the first battle of Ai.

Remember last year, we covered the first battle of Ai where the Israelites were defeated. But there's a big contrast. And we're meant to notice this. And it's written in such a way that we notice this contrast.

So look, for example, at verse 1. Then the Lord said to Joshua, do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you and go up to attack Ai. Therefore, I have delivered it into your hands, the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.

Now, I want you to compare that. That's how this battle started with how the previous battle started back in chapter 7. Verse, let's find it.

[11 : 25] Right at the beginning. I think it's verse 3. The spies came back. Yeah, it's 7 verse 3. So Joshua sent spies to Ai. They came back and said, not all the army will have to go up against Ai.

Send 2,000 or 3,000 men and take it. And do not worry the whole army for only a few people live there. So about 3,000 went up, but they were routed by the men of Ai. So that's how the first battle started.

Do you see the difference? Do you notice the difference between how the first one started and the second started? The first one, they said, oh, we don't have to send the whole army, just a few.

The second one, God said, take all the troops. The first one, they didn't even listen to God. The second one, they were waiting for God's instructions. Very different how these battles started. The first battle, you see, the Israelites thought, ah, this is going to be easy.

So easy that they don't even have to wait for God's instructions. You know, it's okay, God, we got this one. No problem. This is easy. You know, God, let us show you how we can do things by ourselves. And yet it didn't work like they expected.

[12 : 25] They only sent a small force, and it didn't turn out well. The second battle, by that time, they had learned their lesson. They had learned that they need to wait. No matter how easy something looks, they need to wait for God's instructions if they're ever going to see success.

Because they were doing God's mission. They were on God's time. They were in God's country. And they were carrying out His will. They're not going to do it themselves. They're not going to do it the way they think is best.

And so they waited until God spoke. And they acted according to God's instructions and God's promises. Notice that they wouldn't have done this unless God had promised.

When Joshua was giving the commands to his men, the orders, he actually, in the middle of it, said, because, this is why you're going to do this, because the Lord has promised to give the city into your hands.

And so they were now acting according to God's promises. The basis of their confidence was completely different. The basis of their confidence in the first battle was on themselves, and the second battle was on God and what He had said, His promises.

[13 : 28] And that is the lesson for us this morning. Where is the basis of your confidence as you go in this life, as you progress in this life, as you try to do God's will in your life?

What is the basis of your confidence? As you head towards eternity, which you're heading towards, none of us can stop it. We're like a steam train on our way, non-stop, towards eternity.

Every one of us is going to get there and face that. As you head towards there, what is the basis of your confidence? Your own strength or God's promises? You see, as humans, we tend to be so self-sufficient, don't we?

We love being self-sufficient. We don't want anybody to help us, because that damages our pride. It makes us feel weak. We think that we can handle life in our own strength.

And because of that, because we think that we are independent, which we're not, because God made us to be dependent on Him always, whether or not we know it, because we think we're independent, you know what God does, sadly?

[14 : 29] He has to send us defeats, like He sent the nation of Israel, His own people. He sent them a defeat. He was in control of their defeat. And sometimes God sends us defeats to show us just how wrong we are when we think we are self-sufficient.

Because there are at least two aspects of life in which we definitely can't rely on ourselves. And I want to tell you what they are. Firstly, in our battle with sin.

And secondly, in reaching eternal life one day. We cannot rely on ourselves for those things. We make the mistake of thinking we can. We make the mistake of thinking that we can fight sin in our own strength, don't we?

Yes, we do. I'm strong enough to avoid sexual temptation. Men, don't you think that? Oh, I can be self-disciplined. I can be strong. I won't look at that website.

I won't look at that woman. I won't, you know, no, I'm strong. I'm disciplined. Rubbish. Don't fool yourself. We think we're self-disciplined enough to avoid anger and avoid angry outbursts, to avoid hatred, to avoid covetousness.

[15 : 36] We think we're in control of our thoughts. But we're not. You see, the Bible teaches that the temptation to sin is far more powerful than we even ever think it is.

It's far more powerful than we think. And the devil is far more powerful than we think. And he's far more subtle than we think. And he's far more crafty than we think. And he's active.

And he's actively working every day on ways to take you away from God. And to take you away from Christ. Ephesians 6. In seniors group on Thursday, we went through a part of Ephesians 6.

And one of the things that stood out there is that it's telling us about the armor of God and putting on the armor of God. It's a good passage to read at home, the end of Ephesians 6, as we fight these battles. But one of the things it says in passing is that you may stand against the devil's schemes.

And when you read that, it actually kind of makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck. Because it's telling us that the devil is scheming against you right now. The devil is actively making plans for your downfall.

[16 : 44] He is actively scheming to make you sin. To draw you into temptation. To draw you away from God. He's busy working at it right now. And he is a real intelligent being.

That should scare you. The devil is scheming. So don't make the same mistake as the Israelites did and think that you can fight these enemies in your own strength.

That's the first thing we've got to learn about this battle. Secondly, though, we think we can resist sin in our own strength.

And because of that, we also think we can enter eternal life by our own efforts. That is a basic human assumption. even amongst Christians, without even thinking it.

We assume that it's because of our decent lifestyles that God's going to smile upon us and let us into eternity one day. And that is the greatest false teaching that religion sprouts today.

[17 : 43] Most religions tell you, do these things, do that, do this, and you can be right with God. Be religious. Do these ceremonies.

I'm not just talking about like Islam and Buddhism and any of them, but also forms of Christianity will teach these things. In churches you will go and you will hear this false teaching sprouted.

Say these prayers. Be a member of this church. Do these ceremonies and then you will earn yourself eternal life. But you see, that's, I hope you see, that's just another form of self-reliance which the Bible teaches against.

It's just religious self-reliance that we do these things and as long as we tick these boxes, then God will be happy with us. It's relying on our own works to earn eternal life. But now, if the battle of Ai teaches you nothing else this morning, if you go out here and you don't remember anything I've said, but one thing, remember this, it's that you cannot enter life in your own strength.

just as much as the Israelites couldn't enter the promised land in their own strength. They thought they were strong. They thought they could. But they made a big mistake. Don't make the same mistake.

[18 : 53] You cannot enter life by your own works, by your own strength. You can only enter life as you rely on God's promises and you live your life in light of them. You see, as the Israelites heard God's promises and then they planned their strategies and tactics around God's promises so we can only go forward in the Christian life and enter eternity one day when we hear God's promises and we act and we live and we strategize and plan in light of those promises and in light of eternity.

That's what we've got to do as Christians. God's promise to his people back then was that they will inherit the promised land, Canaan, as long as they listened to him and acted according to his promises.

Well, God's promises to his people today in the new covenant is that you will enter the promised land. You will find victory against your enemies. You will find salvation through trusting in Jesus Christ and Jesus works on your behalf.

It's interesting. The book of Joshua, one of the other parallels that we pick up, one of the other ways it foreshadows the New Testament is that Joshua's name in Aramaic was Yeshua.

Jesus' name in Aramaic was Yeshua. It was exactly the same name. And Joshua, you know, God's trying to make the point that Joshua foreshadows Jesus. As his people listened to God, trusted his promises and followed the leader that he gave them, so as his people today, as we listen to God in the Bible, trust his promises and follow the leader, Yeshua, that he gives us today, so we will enter life.

[20 : 26] Not by our own efforts though. It's through trusting in Jesus and trusting in Jesus, his works on our behalf and his death on our behalf. So have you done that?

I've got to ask that. I try to ask that almost every Sunday because I'm not assuming that just because you came to church you've trusted in Jesus and you've given your life to him. Lots of people go to church and they're still living for themselves.

They're still living their own way in their own strength. Is that you this morning? Have you come to Jesus? Have you trusted in him? Have you trusted in his promises? And what has death achieved for you?

Have you heard and believed God's promise through Jesus and responded to it? And are you ordering your steps in life and your direction according to what Jesus has done or are you still relying on your own works and living your own way?

Ask yourself that question. I don't know. I can't tell just by looking at you. You can say all the right words. You've got to ask yourself deep within your heart are you truly a follower of Jesus?

[21 : 28] Do you truly trust him? Because remember what happened to the Israelites when they thought that they could get to their promised land in their own works by their own strength?

They couldn't. That's the first thing we need to live in light of and base our hope on. God's promises not our abilities. And that will be seen in our daily life.

How much we're relying on God. How much we're praying to God. How much we're reading the word. How much we're gathering together with other Christians. If we're truly reliant on God and not ourselves we will need those things.

We will need to be with other Christians. We will need to read the Bible. God's promises must be central to our life. Secondly, God's power.

It's the second P that you've got to remember this morning. Not only does this battle contrast with the first battle of Ai but it also contrasts with the battle of Jericho that happened before that. Remember what happened there?

[22 : 23] The battle of Jericho. It was bizarre. It was the most bizarre battle that I've ever read. God told his troops to put all their armor on and take all their weapons but you're not going to fight the enemy.

You're just going to march around his city seven times. Or for seven days and then seven times and you're going to blow trumpets and you're going to carry the ark. It's bizarre. But then they did that not quite knowing why and on the seventh day once they did it all the walls of Jericho fell down and they entered the city and took it.

And so that battle the first battle of Jericho was won miraculously. The people didn't need a fight. They didn't need to do anything except what God told them about marching around the city. God did all the fighting for them.

While this battle, Ai, which is the second city they conquered, it seems to be the very opposite, doesn't it? It seems to be all as a result of their own efforts and their own tactics.

It seems dependent on the clever use of strategy. And there's technically no miracle. The battle of Ai was not miraculous at all, whereas the battle of Jericho was completely miraculous.

[23 : 30] And so if you were standing up on a hill, just imagine you were up there all these years ago, how many, like three and a half thousand years ago, looking down at the battle of Ai and you saw everything that happened and you were watching it.

Nothing that you saw could have told you that God was involved. It looked purely like the strategies of men. But reading the Bible, we know better, don't we?

We know that God was behind it all. It was God's plan to set up the ambush. It was God's timing when to set it in motion. And so even though on the surface this looks very different to the battle of Jericho, it was no less God's power at work for his people, but in a totally different way.

You see, God exercised his power to give his people victory in both battles and yet in very different ways. But he exercised his power through his word as his people obeyed it.

That was at the heart of it. And that's how he always exercises his power. Even today, God is exercising his power in this world, in your life, and he's doing it through his word right now.

[24 : 37] Right now, as you listen to his word, as you consider it in your mind, as it settles in your soul, God is working powerfully but you've got to respond to it.

You see, that was the whole point. In both battles, God spoke and they had victory as they responded to God's word. Even though it looked very different. You know, you might not see miracles in your life.

You might want a miracle. You might want God to demonstrate his power in some amazing, visible way, but that's not necessarily going to happen. In fact, most of the time it won't, but it doesn't mean that God is not still powerfully working in your life just because things look ordinary.

God works through the ordinary, not just through the extraordinary. God works through the ordinary habits of just listening to his word, just making quiet times, just, you know, meeting with other Christians, praying, studying the Bible.

That is how God works and exercises his power in this world as his people just daily, obediently, ordinarily, read his word and do what it says.

[25 : 50] That's how God works powerfully to carry out his plans in this world and to save people in this world. And that is how God works powerfully in your life to help you fight the battles against sin and against the devil that you will face.

Just as you make those ordinary daily habits, you know, God's not only at work and miracles happen. He's a God of the regular. He's a God of the ordinary as well.

And so, as you set up these daily disciplines, which I hope you are doing this year, daily disciplines of reading God's word, even if you read it one morning and there's no fireworks and there's no big penny-dropping moment and you don't feel much, it's just the daily, ordinary habit of doing that and of meeting other Christians and of coming to church and sitting under God's word, it's through that that God works powerfully behind the scenes in your life.

Just as God worked behind the scenes in this battle, you couldn't notice him but he was there, we know, in the Bible. So, God works behind the scenes in your life as you just obey his word regularly.

So, don't neglect those daily disciplines. God's power, that's how it works. But there's one final truth about God that we need to live in light of this morning and it's an uncomfortable one and it's God's punishment.

[27 : 11] You know, it would be great if we had stopped the reading at verse 24 and not read any further because after verse 24 we read about the Israelites carrying out God's command to kill all the people of Ai, even not the soldiers.

And then, the old NIV is quite polite and it says they hung the king of Ai on a tree. They actually impaled him on a sharpened stake which is pretty gross.

And this is the kind of violence that we try to avoid seeing. You know, when we see it on TV we switch it off, hopefully. It's the kind of violence that we try to avoid hearing about because it offends our modern civilized sensibilities.

But here it is in the Bible in black and white. The Bible is a violent book and God is a violent God. God is not the sanitized picture that we like to think of that the Western world paints for us.

God is a violent God. He's completely good. Make no mistake. He's completely holy. He's completely righteous. But he is violently opposed to anybody and anything that resists his rule and that threatens the future that he is preparing for his people.

[28 : 26] He, for those people, he will stop at nothing to destroy. and that's scary. God is a violent God. And that might offend you but I want to tell you this morning he has every right to be. He has every right to be because he owns everyone. He gives everyone life. Every breath you breathe, every breath everyone breathes is because of God alone that is giving life to them.

and so God has every right to take life away when and how he sees fit which he does every day in natural disasters for example. God is not out of control when earthquakes hit and when tsunamis hit.

God is in control. God is taking life because those are foreshadows of his ultimate judgment. Those are meant to wake us up. You see, and because God is the standard of justice, you know, we have this concept of justice, what is right and wrong.

Do you know where we got that from? God. He determines what is right and wrong and so by definition, his punishment here, even though it's violent, it is just. Even if it upsets us, it is right, it is just and we've got to adjust the way we think about God to match this.

[29 : 44] And we need to know this, we need to read the uncomfortable parts because today as well, God is preparing a future for his people just as he was back then. It's a much better future than even the Israelites look forward to.

They look forward to a physical land, a temporary physical land in this world. We look forward to an ultimate eternal physical world to come which will never end. And God is preparing that future for his people.

This world is not God's plan. This is not the ultimate of God's plan. This is just temporary. This is just on the way to something, on the way to eternity. God's plan is a new world without any suffering or pain or sickness or death, a perfect world, a holy world.

And he sent Jesus to this world to suffer so he could justify us and sanctify us in preparation for that world to come. And that's why we come to church so that through what Jesus did on the cross we know that we are right with God and we are heading to eternity and it's through this, it's through hearing his word and fellowship that we are sanctified in preparation for eternity.

But because Jesus came to do that and because only he can bring us into eternity, into life, people who reject Jesus and the salvation he offers, which are many, God really has no reason to keep them around, does he?

[31 : 05] What's the point of them staying around if they're not going to accept the salvation that Jesus has offered? And the destruction of Ai and its king is just a foreshadow of the violent and eternal destruction that anybody who rejects Jesus will ultimately face.

And that should scare us, that should shock us when we think of our neighbors, when we think of our work colleagues who have no time for Jesus, who just reject him.

What we read about in Joshua 8 is a foreshadow of what they're going to face, just as these people of Ai did. But God wants us to know in this chapter that he will violently oppose anyone who resists his right to rule them.

And he will punish and destroy with eternal fire anyone who is not fit for the promised land, which is his holy perfect new creation. So, in closing this morning, are you fit for that new world?

Are you fit for it? Well, there's only one way you can be fit for God's promised land in eternity, and that is through Jesus Christ, our Joshua.

[32 : 17] You see, the reason these Israelites were given the right to go to the promised land is because they obeyed God's covenant requirements. And any of those who didn't obey God's covenant requirements, like Achan, was destroyed.

And so these people religiously obeyed God's covenant requirements and all the sacrifices that were necessary. And that's how they could enter the promised land. Well, in the same way, the only way you and I have any right to enter eternal life is by obeying God's new covenant requirements, which is to trust and follow Jesus Christ, who came to be our ultimate sacrifice.

And just like the Israelites had their covenant ceremony, which we read on at the end of chapter 8, to remember the promises and the responsibilities of the covenant they had with God, so we have a covenant ceremony this morning called the Lord's Supper, which Jesus commands us to perform on a regular basis in church to remember His promises, to bring us eternal life, as well as to remember our responsibility to listen, to obey, and to follow Jesus all the days of our life.

And that's what we're going to do now as I end this sermon. We're going to partake in this new covenant ceremony which God has given us. And I invite everyone who has repented and put their faith in Jesus Christ to join us in this covenant ceremony and in it, not just to take it because it's what we do.

I want you to realize the significance again of what we're about to do. Because it's in this, as we eat this bread and drink this grape juice, that we remember the promises that Jesus came to secure for us as He died, as He gave His body, as He shed His blood.

[34 : 01] As well as the responsibility we have to feed on Jesus every day by faith with thanksgiving. It's all our remaining in the deliverance of the New Pigmack gospels.

■■ Relax. Besides my,