

Text: Joshua 5:13 - 6:5, 20

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" 15 The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. 1 Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. 2 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "see, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 3 March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in. . . 20 When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

"I just can't do that!" Have you ever heard yourself say that? To many, it is a thought and perhaps words that pass through their minds and their lips on a regular basis. It is the great limiting factor in many people's lives. Many people who analyze human behavior will say, "If you think you can't, you can't." What we believe we cannot do is very likely to become our reality.

How has that belief system, "I just can't do that," affected people over the years? How has that belief system affected human history? And how has that belief system affected your personal faith? All of those are good and important questions for us to ask. But the answer might be more elusive than we think. This Word of God from Joshua this morning helps us ask and answer those questions. Let's take another look at the familiar Bible story of the Fall of Jerusalem and see if the Lord will lead us to some answers in our own lives.

The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!

Joshua fit de battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho.

Joshua fit de battle of Jericho and the walls come tumblin' down!

To much of our popular culture, that spiritual is about the only thing they know about this amazing incident where the Lord showed his power to Israel and to her enemies. But even a casual hearing of the story again suggests that there's a lot more there. Most of us have probably learned or taught the story in Sunday School, but a closer examination may surprise us that there's a lesson here for us today as well.

Israel was afraid. They were entering new territory, both literally and figuratively. God had finally given them what he had promised. He was permitting them to enter the promised land. But this blessing brought with it many challenges and those challenges were accompanied by fears. Problem number one: some time earlier a group of spies had been sent into the Promised Land to scout out the options. The majority report came back very pessimistic! "The land is 'flowing with milk and honey,' but the inhabitants are so big and strong that they will squash us like bugs," was the report. Of course, that would put fear into almost anyone – anyone except two of the delegation named Joshua and Caleb. Their report could be summarized in the words, "If the Lord is with us and enables us, we can take the land."

Well the damage was done and they didn't go – not then. But now things had changed, and that brought with it new fears – problem number two. Long time leader Moses was gone and Joshua was now in charge of the nation. The Lord had provided a smooth transition in leadership, but for some it brought new questions. "Is this new guy up to the task?" Can he take a group of nomads who, as a nation, hadn't seen combat in 500 years and turn them into a fighting machine that could conquer cities like Jericho?

Ah, there was problem number three. Jericho. Jericho was a large, heavily walled city located on the main highway. It was also the first place in the path of the invading Israelite nation. And when they saw the Israelites approaching, it got even more

challenging. The Bible says, *Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out or came in.* In other words, they were in a strong defensive position, ready for the approaching invaders. Remember, this was the place that the spies identified as filled with giants. Human evaluation seemed to indicate that the Israelites had little chance of being successful in overcoming the city of Jericho.

But when all seemed hopeless, the Lord intervened. *Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"* 14 *"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."* Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him *"What message does my Lord have for his servant?"* Give Joshua credit. He knew when the Lord was trying to get his attention. And he was certainly open to what the Lord had to say. The issue was that what the Lord had to say to him was strange at best and would have been troubling to any experienced military man.

2 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "see, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. 3 March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in. . . I've never been in the military, but if I were, I think that I'd be somewhat skeptical about the strategic value of those kinds of orders! Suppose you were a war correspondent. You are watching the battle unfold, but rather than seeing men with swords or bows and arrows, rather than seeing troops with ladders and battering rams or siege works, you see a parade led by the clergy, complete with the band, and not a soldier in sight. For six days they parade around the city once a day and then on the seventh day they circle the city seven times. Somehow, if I'm a watchman on the wall of the city or a resident in the streets, I'm not exactly quaking in my boots or paralyzed with fear with this spectacle going on around my nice, safe city walls!

Let's just pause for a moment and see if we can learn anything. Have you ever felt like the Israelites must have felt? "I trust you, Lord! I'll follow your directions when the going gets tough! You want me to do what??" Do God's ways ever seem odd and counter-productive to you? "I'm broke, and you want me to give some of my money to the church for your work? I'm afraid that I can't do that job, but you want me to take it and trust in you? I don't know a soul there, but you want me to take that job and to move to the west coast? We're barely making it and you want me to quit my job to be a stay-at-home mom?" Please understand, God does not appear to us and give us a direct message like he did to Joshua. But he still guides us and gives us direction. He does it through his Word. And it's not just sitting down and reading our Bible. He guides us through the Word remembered from years of study. He guides us through the Word which other Christians share with us. And God guides us through the Word that may come to us in the form of Christian advice, counsel – call it whatever you want. God is in charge at every turn and guides us in the way he knows best.

Back to the story. At this point, we'll make a long story short. In the verses of Joshua 6 that were not included in our lesson, we hear how Joshua and the Israelite nation carried out God's plan to the final detail. They marched around once a day for six days and seven times for one day. The priests led the parade and the final assault was mounted by a mighty cry from the fighting men. And then the unthinkable happened! The wall come tumblin' down! Archeologist say the walls were some of the thickest, most impenetrable that they have seen. People have tried for over 3000 years to explain how this happened by natural means. They can't! The Bible puts it simply. *20 When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.* While the soldiers still had their work to do, the Lord gave them the victory by taking away the huge advantage that Jericho had with his almighty and preserving power.

If they had newspapers or Facebook or Twitter back in Joshua's day, can you imagine what the headlines looked like? Israel defeats Jericho in upset win! Unexplained building collapse causes huge loss of life! Joshua shows unexpected display of military might! But any of those headlines would really miss the point, wouldn't they. Like so many other incidents in the history of God's saving plan, the real story is that God is always in charge and arranges the affairs of human history so that they service his purpose and his people. If you could ask Joshua for his analysis, I think he would say **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!**

You and I need to remember that in our lives. **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!** When the finances

are in a mess, **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!** Let him take control of all parts of your life and the problems will begin to fix themselves. When we don't feel up to the job at work, **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!** Trust that he will give you the ability and the people around you to do what needs to be done. When the course of our life takes us to strange and unfamiliar place, **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!** The Lord will show you the people who can fix your loneliness and show you how you can be a blessing to others in your new home.

Joshua and the people of Israel had a huge task in front of them before they could successfully occupy the Promised Land as God had promised. Read the rest of the book of Joshua to see just how huge it was. But just like this day at Jericho, God continued to show them both by word and deed that **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!** And every day of your life, he will teach you the same thing.

Let God fight your battles for you because **The Battle is Won by Remembering Who's in Charge!**

Amen.