

TAKING POSSESSION OF WHAT GOD PROVIDES - Part one

Sunday, December 29th, 2019 - 10 a.m. - Teaching #2181

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

WHEN THE PROMISE OF GOD COMES UP AGAINST A STONE WALL

I went through a couple of studies in my Christian Education class and asked specifically if they would mind if I re-worked them for a couple of Sunday mornings in the New Years season. They promised they wouldn't get up and walk out. That's the root of these next two Sunday mornings.

There are two "**J's**" that history has forever tied together. When you think of **Joshua** you think of **Jericho**. Chapter six of the book of Joshua is the famous chapter. It really forms a turning point. It's the beginning of the actual conquest of the enemies in the promised land. The first five chapters are really **preparatory** to this launching of the offensive. So chapter 6 is a great text about important **beginning points - starting points** in taking hold of what God has graciously promised and given entry into.

Here's the important launching point this morning. Success for these people wouldn't come the way they expected it to come. What God provides won't be established on their own terms. They're expecting a **military** victory won by their own strength.

Strangely, it will turn out to be something other than a **military** victory. They will march around the walls of Jericho once each day for the first six days, seven times on the seventh, blow the ram's horns and shout. The walls will come falling down. Or, to quote the only **Elvis Presley** record my parents ever allowed into our house - "**Joshua 'fit' the battle of Jericho and the walls come 'a-tumblin' down.**"

But if the **military** exercise is slight, the **lessons** are weighty and, I think, strikingly relevant as we all collectively bump into the walls of a new year.

1) ALWAYS ACT ON GOD'S WORD AS THOUGH IT WERE MORE CERTAIN THAN ANYTHING ELSE

Joshua 6:1-5 - "Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. [2] And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. [3] You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. [4] Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. [5] And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

It's almost too bad we know this story so well because the **set-up** for this account ought to strike us as very odd. What **looks** like the easiest battle in history was mentally one of the toughest for a military leader to commit to. There is nothing reasonable in this account. Nothing in the promise or the instructions fits Joshua's expectations. Everything feels counter-intuitive.

Just picture Joshua as he gives the battle instructions for his very **first** military campaign. In his very first venture he is truly **forced** to put his trust in God on the line. And the soldiers are truly **forced** to trust Joshua, their newly minted leader.

Would a group of soldiers - **military** men - be willing to totally acquiesce to what had to appear to them as totally foolish, time wasting instructions? What do you think their inward thoughts were? What were they whispering about Joshua? Would they follow in obedience, even when they saw nothing but disappointment in the act itself?

This cuts close to home for all of us this morning. How would they respond when what God was commanding them to do **didn't seem to be at all related to solving the problem at hand**? And would they continue to trust and obey for the whole seven days? After all, why didn't the walls come down right away? For six days the only thing that stirs is the dust under their feet.

Here is what I see being played out in this great account. Every time God comes and offers promise and hope into a hopeless situation His promise always looks small and impotent against the visible, material reality of what you're up against. At the **beginning** circumstances always look **bigger** than the promise into which you are called to place your trust. And this account reminds us all this has **always** been the case.

Imagine, these walls are thick enough to contain the entire home of a woman (*Rahab*) and her family. And then the instructions come: **"Just march around them quietly for a few days. Then do it again repeatedly - the very same things you've already been doing with no effect whatsoever - on the seventh and blow your trumpets."** **"Yea, then what?"** **"That's it. The walls will come down."** You and I can't imagine how ridiculous those instructions must have looked to trained soldiers.

It's more than just a cute Sunday School story. It gets replayed in our own lives in dozens of situations every week. I am repeatedly called into a humbling learning curve. The issue is learning that God commands nothing in vain. Every command from God comes with your ultimate **freedom** in mind. But those commands don't **appear** to carry our freedom. They can appear so powerless and irrelevant.

We don't always see the **connection** between God's Word and our own deliverance. Our biggest battle isn't Jericho. It's to learn to trust implicitly in God's promise when His promise seems smaller than our circumstances.

I chose the title for this teaching carefully. Lots of situations look impossible - like a **stone wall**. Lots of times we don't see how doing what the Bible says is going to change anything. God deliberately teaches these people to keep marching when it doesn't **look** like His plan is working. That's the **reason** for those first six trips around the wall. God **could** have leveled the walls on the first day but that **wouldn't** have taught the Israelites to trust God in the face of His apparent **inactivity** the first six.

What do you do when it doesn't look like God is doing anything? What are you **going to do** when that happens to you in 2020? What do you do when His promises and plans seem like so much dry dust under your feet? **That's** the issue of those first six days of marching.

God is pressing home a strong teaching point here. There were **more** days when it looked like God's plan **wasn't** working than days when it looked like it **was** working. And **both** those seasons served a divine, fruitful purpose in the plan of God.

I can tell you from years of dealing with people and their battles and their sins that the **Joshua plan** for the manifesting of God's hand is usually forgotten:

"My husband doesn't love me anymore. He's getting crude and spiritually dull, and ungodly. I'm getting tired of the way he ignores the family. What should I do?"

1 Peter 3:1-5 - "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— [2] when they see your respectful and pure conduct. [3] Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— [4] but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. [5] For this is how the **holy women who hoped in God** used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands...."

Christians almost feel embarrassed reading those words. Counselors usually ignore them. And here's why. They look **small in scale compared to the hurt and damage in the situation**. Those words look like - sound like - they don't work. They read like culturally out-of-date religious mumbo-jumbo - just preacher talk - church talk.

I'm sure there are women here today - right now - and those words from Peter feel like so much gravel because you've **tried** to do that and **nothing** has changed - at least not yet. And it hadn't for all of those women Peter wrote to either. We know that because Peter had to keep telling them to put **"their hope in God."** And the apostle Paul reminds his readers nbody hopes for what he already sees.

"Pastor Don, I really feel I should tithes. But we can't pay all of our bills now. What's a family supposed to do?" Malachi 3:10 - "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

And there arises that small voice in the corner of your cranium reminding you Bible verses won't pay the hydro bill. The promise doesn't feel as big as the situation. That's why God demands hope for something they can't see yet - **"...put me to the test...."**

"I've tried to forsake that one sin so many times, I can't even count the attempts anymore. Nothing seems

to work. I don't think I will ever experience the new life in Christ that others seem to find. I can't keep going on. No one could blame me for giving up! -" 1 Corinthians 10:13 - "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Dozens of examples could be raised and the point would be the same. Do you see it? None of those promises - and dozens of others like them - look like they work. These are all **walls - solid stone barriers** - that look and feel immovable. They make the bare command and promise of God look ridiculous.

That's what the Jericho account is really all about. If a person tries to fire a promise at a problem only to pack the march in after two or three trips around the walls he or she will rip up the very faith that could save. True, sometimes giants fall with the very first stone. We praise God for that gloriously brief account of David's victory over Goliath. But far more often God waits and calls **us** to grow in trust.

Understand this. It's what you do at that point that is the measure of your commitment to Jesus. And it's what you do at that point that will determine your future forever. Which way do you choose when nothing seems to be happening? Stop marching and the walls of your circumstances forever shut you out from God's appointed, promised future. You have a very tough choice staring you in the face.

Look at **verse 11** - **"So he caused the ark of the Lord to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp."**

Wouldn't you just love to listen to those soldiers bunking together? What floats through the head when after you've done what God told you to do, you go to bed at night with nothing different than when you started out that morning? It's important to plan for these times because there will be many such nights. There is no pillow-talk more crucial than this.

There is one more less known event and lesson from the story of Jericho. It may be the most important of all:

2) **IF THE MARCH OF FAITH SEEMS HARD, THE COST OF UNBELIEF IS HARDER**

There's a dramatic part of this Jericho story that isn't as well known as those tumbling walls. It's a little discomfiting. God seems very harsh in His treatment of the city after the walls fell and it's important to know **why**:

Josuha 6:24-27 - **"And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. [25] But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. [26] Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. 'At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.'" [27] So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land."**

Not only did the walls come down, they were never to be rebuilt. God pronounced a curse on anyone who took it upon himself or herself to reconstruct the walls of Jericho. You can read about a man who tried to rebuild the walls of Jericho on the same location. The story is found in **1 Kings 16:34** - **"In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun."**

What is going on here? Is God just having a bad day? NO. Behold one little verse of almost unknown Bible trivia. The Holy Spirit plants this one obscure verse to immunize the careful reader against ever taking God's Word lightly. But why **not** rebuild the city? Ruins will look ugly in their new land. Imagine as the Israelites gradually drive out the enemies, build their own fortified cities, plant their fields, make their new home prosperous and beautiful. And then there's that one pile of rubble, that mountain of ruins over there by the road. What's **that** all about?

Actually, the city was resettled quite soon after its destruction (see **Joshua 18** and **Judges 3**). No curse came into effect. But in the days of Ahab, a man named **Hiel** rebuilt the **walls** around the city, the **foundations** of the city, and his firstborn died as God had said.

God didn't level the whole city of Jericho. The Israelites did that. It was the **walls** of the city God leveled. And it was the **walls** - the **leveling of the walls** - that was the issue of **faith and obedience** for the army. It was in the divine leveling of the **walls** of the city that their **trust** was tested and their **obedience** rewarded.

Do you see it? The walls were the symbol of ***the results of trust in the promise of God - how God did what was seemingly impossible.*** And the Israelites - and ***we*** - constantly face those kinds of things. And we constantly need this ***reminder*** of who our unchanging God ***is*** and what our unchanging God ***does.***

That's why Hiel was judged. He rebuilt the walls ***God*** had leveled. This was a ***man*** undoing the work of ***God.*** This was mere man taking the promise of God and putting it into ***reverse.*** That's the whole issue of the curse. That's the eternal lesson God wanted staring His people in the face.

We build our own systems of defense. We secure our lives in our own ways. We instinctively try so hard to cover our bases. And that fallen pile of rubble is the ***reminder*** - the ***proof*** - that God's ways are always best. ***And it's important that those stones be left in that fallen state because all the walls we face look like they can't possibly come down with nothing but a promise from God!***

This lesson isn't easily learned. We never finally get it into our souls. So God wants something - something like the ruins of the walls of Jericho - to be a ***permanent reminder*** to all of us. Those ruined walls were ***God's memorial*** - a permanent marker shouting, ***"Once you've set yourself to walk in my ways, once you've cleaned the idols of self-will and the world's ways out of your life, don't ever allow yourself to fall back on those things again. Leave the ways of self-trust in ruins! And never forget my unbounded power that comes even when you don't think it possibly can!"***

Take this truth home with you. Don't rebuild your life on your own terms. Leave a testimony of God's power for future generations. That's why God told Joshua not to ever rebuild the walls He leveled. He wants those broken walls to tell the story of His power over what appear to be solidly hopeless situations. Tell the story of our great God. Include all the details. And keep marching, no matter what.