

WALLS - TRUSTING AND OBEYING GOD FAITHFULLY, EVEN WHEN THE WALL SEEMS UNBREAKABLE.

We all encounter “walls” in our lives. These “walls” seem to block the way to the things we expected. These “walls” exist in different forms in each of our lives. But what do we do when those walls seem unbreakable? When we encounter these walls in our lives, how are we supposed to respond? This morning, I want to look at a story that if I’m being honest, I struggle to believe could even have happened. It’s a story about the Israelites. And what they did when they encountered “walls” in their lives.

But first, I’ve gotta tell you about this video online, it was what looked like a rock climbing tournament, or something like that. One of the first obstacles on the wall were these 2 circles spaced probably about 4-5 feet apart. And I watched this guy quickly grab on to them... and then pause to assess the situation. The few people in the audience knew him by name and were cheering him on. He’s hanging there with his hands almost fully stretched in either direction and his feet dangling. Looking at the situation, I thought he was stuck and that there was no possible way he was getting any higher on the wall. And then all of a sudden, he reacts explosively and jumps up using only his arms to get a higher grip of these circles. Now he’s high enough he can use his feet as leverage and then he quickly pulls himself all the way up and moves on to the next obstacle. I don’t know if what I saw was just average to a seasoned rock climber, but my mind was blown. He did something that I didn’t think was possible and he was able to climb all the way up and over the wall.

Now, there’s a good chance most of you are like me... and when we’re presented with a real life wall in front of us... we’ll look for the stairs, a ladder, or a way around. But some times those “walls” we face... aren’t physical walls... I’m talking about the obstacles and barriers that we each face in our lives. It’s critically important that we have a plan for what to do when we face circumstances... or “walls” that seem impossible to get past. Do you have a plan for overcoming the walls you encounter in your life? Is this something you spend any amount of time thinking about? Or is it like how we’re all supposed to have an emergency evacuation plan at home... as if we’re all not just going to run for the door picking up the most valuable things we see along the way. Are you like most of us... Are you just reacting to the wall when you get close to it? This morning I plan to look at a group of people who encountered an impossible wall... And I believe their experience will teach us how to overcome or conquer the walls in our own lives.

The first key element we’re going to talk about is faith.

Hebrews 11:6

Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

It’s impossible to please God without faith! Right after this verse the author of Hebrews takes their time to walk the listener through some examples of this that they would be familiar with. Noah needed faith because he was building a boat on dry land. Abraham was sent to an unknown place, and because he obeyed and showed he had faith in God he was promised that God would look after him and his many descendants. Sarah showed her faith in God by believing that she would have a child even though she was way too old to be having kids. And her faith was rewarded with the descendants God promised them. Abraham then needed some more faith to trust in God when they finally get their God-promised-son, and then he was told to sacrifice him on an altar. Isaac needed faith... Jacob needed faith... Moses needed faith... So did Gideon, so did Samson, and David, Samuel, and all the prophets. Faith was an essential element in their lives... And it’s also an essential element in our lives and our relationship with God. It’s so essential... that without faith, a relationship with God, according to this verse... is not possible. So here is where we get to the story that I want to focus on this morning.

Joshua 6

Moses has just died, and Joshua has taken over as the “new Moses”. He led them across the Jordan river and into the Promised Land. The problem is... there’s people already living there. God promised them this land... And here they are to finally enjoy the land they were promised... But there’s a giant wall surrounding it. We’re

not talking an old split rail fence on the boarder of an old farm property that has started to fall apart and deteriorate. No these are strong fortified walls built with the main purpose of defending the people inside the wall and making sure no one else can come and take the land. What was Israel—God’s chosen people—You know... the actual people who were promised that land, supposed to do... How are they supposed to take the land if they can’t even get past the walls? How are they supposed to conquer... How are they supposed to enjoy God’s plan for them... When this wall is in their way? Well, God tells Joshua exactly what they need to do. And this is the part that I struggle with. Because it doesn’t make sense. God tells Joshua to send their army, and seven priests with rams-horns trumpets to lead the ark of the covenant around the walls once a day... for 6 days! And then on the 7th day, they were to mix things up and walk around the walls 7 times, and then blow the horns really loud, and have everyone shout... and the walls will just crumble and fall over.

Do you see what I mean. Let’s just be honest with one another here... that plan doesn’t make sense. I think I’ve watched every episode of Mythbusters. And I remember an episode when they had an army march—in sync—across a bridge to see if they could get enough harmonic oscillation to cause the bridge to collapse. And thats where my mind immediately goes to when I read this story. “Ohhh God must have known that they built the wall on a fault line or they built the wall in a way that wouldn’t be able to stand the harmonic oscillation that they would cause by marching around the walls... that MUST be why He told them to march around the walls... to weaken them” But Mythbusters busted that myth... I think they came back and switched it to plausible in a later episode... but they just couldn’t prove that marching could have that effect.

God gave the Israelites an unconventional plan to see the walls come crumbling down... But in faith, they believed what God said... And they did what He said. Sometimes, God gives instructions about how to approach the walls in our lives... that don’t make sense. The question isn’t whether or not it makes sense...The question is... Do we trust God enough to put our faith in... His ways? When you walk in faith, God will make the path straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

5Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own understanding;
6in all your ways know him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Faith is leaning on God’s understanding... even when it doesn’t make sense to you. Scripture promises that our path will be straight... when we put our faith in God. In the Israelites’ case, they put their faith in God, even when His plan didn’t make sense... And then... even if you don’t know this story... you can probably guess what happened. On the 7th day, they walked around 7 times, and then they blew the horns really loud, and everyone shouted... And the walls actually came down. How would that even be possible? It doesn’t make sense! What’s happening is... my brain is trying to make sense of something super-natural that took place. I’ll probably never find a theory or explanation that satisfies my craving to know how this actually happened. And I think thats exactly God’s point. Israel didn’t do anything other than simply obeying God. I believe that God could had them walk backwards... or crawl on all fours... and as long as they obeyed him, those walls were going to fall. Because if you look at the next story in Joshua almost immediately after the Israelites were successful against Jericho, they were unsuccessful against Ai {eye} Why? Because once they tasted a bit of success... they started thinking for themselves. And some of them took some of the belongings from Jericho that they were told to leave for God. See, as soon as they stopped fully trusting in God’s plan for them... Once they no longer had faith in God’s plan for them... The next set of “walls” they encountered... they were defeated by them. So are you leaning on God’s understanding... or your own?

Okay so that was one of the things they did right. The next thing, was that they did it together. Last weekend the Chiefs beat the Eagles in the Super Bowl. They had a weak first half, and Mahomes hobbled into the locker room at half. And they came out in the second half like a brand new team. So the reporters were quick to ask them, what changed? What did Andy Reid say to you that made you come out and dominate in the second half like you did. And they all said something similar. They all said something like, “Coach pointed out that we

weren't playing as a team... we were all making little un-characteristic mistakes because we weren't playing together" Whether that's all that it was... Or if it was that, the Eagles, were just unnecessarily penalized for that holding call... We'll never know. But for my sermon illustration it works really well to say that: In the parts of life that involve other people, unity is a key ingredient! We are called to live in unity. With God... And with others. Are you good at living in unity with God or the people in your life? Or are you someone who finds yourself in conflict with other people? The truth is, if we're going to see the impossible walls in our lives come down... it's critically important that we learn to live in unity. One of the things we can learn from the Israelites' story is that they walked together.... in unity. They walked around the walls of Jericho with one another, in silence for six days. On the seventh day, they once again walked together, and then they all gave a loud shout at the same time. It was mission-critical that each of them were unified and worked together. The same is true for us. If we want to see impossible walls come down in our lives... We need to learn how to live in unity with those in our lives. When you walk in unity, you will see the walls in your life fall. In John 17:21 Jesus was praying one of his final prayers. And after he prayed specifically for his disciples he moved on and prayed for everyone who believes in Him. Look what he says:

John 17:21

20 "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. 21 May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.

Jesus understood the importance of unity. One of the last prayers that He prayed was him praying we would learn to live in unity with God... and others. When we live in unity with God and others, we see that it has the ability to bring down walls in our own lives, like it did for the Israelites... But maybe even more importantly, the way we live in unity... and the way we show love to others... Makes other people see and believe in Jesus. This is exactly how Jesus lived his life. He lived in constant unity with the Father... And He lived in unity with others, like His disciples... even though they constantly questioned and doubted Him. Over the past few years, there's a few topics, or conversations that I've learned to avoid. Everyone is so divided that it feels impossible to reach to the other side. Take a second to imagine the feeling you have when your cousin's spouse gets going on one of their "political rants" at your family get-together. Picture the anger and the frustration you feel when someone posts something online that you disagree with. And now think... Jesus prayed that we as believers would live in unity with others... that includes the ones we think are on the wrong side. And he prayed that we'd show them enough love... That the world would notice. I could go on and on about the importance of this point... but for the sake of time we need to move on.

Another thing they did—to see the walls fall—was walk with praise. Have you ever been to a playoff game of any sport? There's something about a playoff game that leaves a lasting memory. My dad took me to a Leafs playoff game in 1996... that was the year when Gretzky played for the St. Louis Blues. That's approaching 30 years ago and I still remember that experience. Or in 2016 I went with some friends to the Jays Wild card game against the Orioles. When Edwin hit the walk off home run in the bottom of the 11th. If I wasn't a Christian, I've said over and over again, the only way I would have been able to explain the moment, was that it was a "spiritual experience". The screaming fans, the literal vibration of the building, the elation that the Jays were going to get the chance to redeem themselves after their loss to the Royals in the previous season's ALDS. I will never, ever, forget that moment... or that feeling.

And it feels wrong to even say this... But it's because we were unified as a body of people, giving praise to "our team"... for all that they had done. Praise isn't only something we do when we sing some worship songs. We don't need to be in a special building... Praise happens when we actively express our admiration of something. To be clear this can happen in songs of worship... each Sunday when we gather together. But that isn't the only place it happens. Do you praise God even as much as the director who created your favourite movies? Do you praise God even as much as your favourite band? Do you actively and regularly say to God how much He means to you? If we can learn from the Israelites, then praise plays a role in bringing down walls in our lives. Israel had been walking each of the six days in silence. But right before the walls came down, they weren't silent anymore. All you could probably hear was the shouting of God's people. There was power in their

shouting... Joshua gave them a purpose... and a reason to shout, He told them to shout because, "God has given them this city" They shouted, not because it just seemed like a good idea... They shouted because God instructed them to do that. God knew that praise would be their breakthrough. When the Israelites shouted, They shouted with praise, and it showed that they believed their God was bigger and more powerful than the walls they faced. The same is true for the "walls" we face.

When I think about the Israelites shouting praises to God and the walls collapsing I'm reminded of Acts 16. When Paul and Silas are in the highest security prison, they were handcuffed and shackled down... What did they do? They starting singing and giving praise to God. What could they possibly have to sing, or to praise God for... They were locked in the middle of the prison with handcuffs and shackles on. They had just been beaten with rods and severely flogged. Here they are faced with a metaphorical wall, as well as at least 4 literal walls surrounding them. They praised God THROUGH their trials. They weren't standing in an aisle in a church... barely mumbling the words they were reading on a screen. They were shouting their prayers and songs to God loud enough that all the other prisoners could hear them. And you probably know what happened... Not only are did their chains come off... But everyone around them, who heard their praise, was also set free. Being handcuffed and restrained by chains, That doesn't just FEEL like an impossible situation, to escape... Thats the literal purpose of being put in that situation. They encountered walls both metaphorically as well as literally. But they met their "walls" with praise... And God set them free.

But its important to clarify something... our praise isn't what brings the "walls" down. Our unity isn't what brings the walls down, our faith isn't even what brings the walls down. Our praise, our faith, our unity moves the heart of God... He is the one who breaks down the walls... He is the one who breaks off the chains.

So this morning... I hope to encourage you... Place your faith in God and His ways... even if His ways don't make sense to you. When you walk in faith, God worries about the rest. He is the One who brings the impossible walls down in our lives. We just need to keep our faith high and placed in Him. He will never leave or forsake us!

We also need to remember the importance to living in unity... Is there someone you can think of, that you can do a better job when it comes to living in unity with them? Let's pretend for a second Jesus was serious when He said,

John 13:34-35

34"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

THEY WILL KNOW WE ARE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS BY OUR LOVE. Not by our ability to argue on Facebook. Not by our ability to state facts we read online. So ask God to give you the grace and strength to show new levels of forgiveness and unity with those you disagree with in your life.

And then finally, remember to praise God! I don't know what everyone here is going through right now... Are you going through a hard situation at home? Are you in the middle of chaos at work? Does it feel like you're never going to be done with school, and you're in a never ending cycle of homework and papers? Are you dealing with a difficult family situation? But you're probably not going to praise God enough to convince him you need a new Ferrari.

Remember this verse from earlier?:

Proverbs 3:5-6

5Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own understanding;
6in all your ways know him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Your praise doesn't break the chains, it doesn't break the walls... it moves the heart of God. If it's His will to do so... He will bring the walls down! The reason why the walls came down, is because that was God's plan for Israel. So trust in the Lord with all your heart! Don't try to do it all on your own! Sometimes the thing you need to do won't make any sense to you... But in all your ways... In EVERYTHING you do... get to know Him more. And as your will, and your desires, begin to align with God's will, and God's desire for your life... He will make your paths straight.

And if the path that GOD is leading you down... Leads straight through a fortified wall... with an army full of your enemies on the other side... You can trust that He's going to break that wall down.

Let's Pray.