

“The Walls of Jericho”

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Let's turn together to Joshua 6. If you're visiting us, we're working our way through the book of Joshua – go to the beginning of the Bible and it's the 6th book in. We're in the 6th chapter. When I was in Bible school, we had some unusual teachers come through at times, and I remember one guy who had a super low voice and was really into the “rhythm of the Spirit” (said while snapping fingers) and one day he decided he wanted to give a prophetic word over every one of us students. We stood in a line and when my turn came, he said, “there's nothing left but the shouting” and moved on. About ten students later, he came to a female student (I think her name was Karen or Kathy) and he said, “there's nothing left but the shouting”. Well, that's all it took: my friend Brad was elbowing me in the ribs, assuming Karen and I were meant to spend our lives shouting together. Since I went on to marry Janice, I have to assume Karen (or whatever her name was) is out there shouting with someone else. I share that story simply to say that I had no idea what the term, “nothing left but the shouting” meant but we find out in Joshua 6. Let's begin by reading **vv. 1-5**.

If you remember, at the end of chapter 5 we find Joshua spying out the city, probably wondering how they're going to breach the wall when he comes across this strange man standing there holding a sword. Joshua asks him, are you for us or for our adversaries, and this man says, “no, but I am the commander of the army of the Lord.” It was the Lord himself, and Joshua took off his shoes and worshipped. And he asked him, what does my lord say to his servant? Tell me what to do.

Chapter six picks up from there noting that the city was shut up tight. No one went in or came out. They were on high alert, ready for war. Joshua is expecting some military strategy for besieging Jericho, and must have been surprised when the Lord said, walk around the walls of Jericho once every day and on the seventh

day, walk around it seven times, have the priests blow the trumpets, all the people shall shout, and the walls will fall down. Obedient to the word of the Lord Joshua had them walk around the city walls once, with the priests and the ark in the center of the procession, the priests blowing their trumpets. Other than the trumpet blasts, it was completely silent. No one said anything, not a shout, not even a word. This would have been pretty eerie for Jericho. Ancient armies often used noise to intimidate their enemies – battle chants and yelling. So for the inhabitants of Jericho to look and see thousands of warriors walking silently, no one speaking, no one shouting, just silence might actually be more intimidating than shouting and yelling. For six days Israel walked quietly around the city once each day. Then came the seventh day. Let's pick it up in verse 15. **Vv. 15-27**

On the seventh day, they walked around the city – and the Jericho folks were probably thinking, here they go again. But this time, they didn't return to the camp. They walked around the city a second time. And a third. Seven times they walked around the city and on the seventh time, the priests blew their trumpets and the people shouted –thousands of warriors shouting. After six days of silence, this shout must have been terrifying to the people of Jericho. And then the walls that they trusted in fell down.

Verse 5 and verse 20 says the walls fall down flat. The Hebrew conveys the sense of the walls not being pushed down, but of a crushing weight pressing from above down on them. We don't know if it was a targeted earthquake, or God just pressed down on the walls, but down they went!

I mentioned early on in this series that I believe this is a timely word for Grace, that God has new land He wants us to take by His power and grace. But we need to know with new land there will be walls that need to come down, and this unique account holds some important lessons for us as we go forward.

1. The world is full of walls

The first line in Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall* says *Something there is that doesn't love a wall*. There may be something that doesn't love a wall, but there is something about this fallen world that loves a wall. We are surrounded by walls. Everywhere.

- Walls of fear
- Walls of guilt
- Walls of anger
- Walls of violence
- Walls of bondage
- Walls of suspicion
- Walls of unforgiveness
- Walls of self-pity
- Walls of pride
- Walls of depression
- Walls of unbelief

Walls keep us in. Walls keep others out. Walls create barriers between us. Robert Frost's writes a little further:

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill; And on a day we meet to walk the line And set the wall between us once again. We keep the wall between us as we go.

We all tend to build walls between us as we go. Walls to protect us from getting hurt. Walls to hurt the other person by withdrawing from them. Walls to prevent others from seeing our sin. Walls of fear of being misunderstood, or to hide a deep sense of inferiority. Walls! If we're going to take new land, there will be walls – lots of walls.

Jericho is a symbol of what sin has done to this world. Sin has turned this world into a world full of walls.

2. God has the power to tear those walls down!

For seven days Israel circled, blew trumpets and shouted. I've never been in the military, but I'm pretty sure that shouting isn't a strategy. Circling and blasting trumpets isn't a strategy. There might be a psychological component – but ultimately you need more than shouting to breach a fortified wall.

Shouting wasn't their strategy – believing in God's promise and power was their strategy. Without God, walking around the city for seven days is a pretty crazy plan. They needed God to show up or they were going to be the laughingstock of Canaan. That's pretty much the message of the entire Bible: without God's power and promises we're done. The gospel isn't, as John Piper says, a help-wanted sign. Jesus didn't come to form a salvation co-op with us. Just as God's mighty hand pressed down on the wall with such force that it buckled and fell, Jesus' mighty hand did on the cross what none of us – or all of us – could ever do.

The greatest wall that sin erected was a wall between us and God. Our relationship with God was bricked off and blocked and there was nothing we could ever do to tear even one brick out of that wall. When Jesus gave his life as a substitute for us, he tore down the wall of hostility between us and God, making forever peace between us.

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... Eph. 2:14

Jesus destroyed the barrier between us and God. God brought down the walls of Jericho. It's God who does it! If the church is going to take new land with God, we will encounter strongholds that defy God and the gospel. Ultimately these strongholds are designed to keep the good news of Christ from getting in and those trapped inside from getting out. Paul writes about these satanic strongholds and about the power of Christ to tear the walls down:

³For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ⁶And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete. 2 Cor. 10:3-6

This tells us that the walls in our lives are made from the brick and mortar of lies. Lies that twist and distort who God is, who we are, what life is – lies that twist and distort our perception about everything. Satan is the father of lies and his kingdom is built with brick and mortar of lies.

We can't pull down the walls that Satan and sin build in our own power. We need God's power to do it. Now on a Sunday morning when we're in church and feeling all spiritual, that sounds real good. But the truth is, Monday through Saturday that's a hard truth for us to accept. We like control, we want to take matters into our own hands. Just give me 3 points or 5 steps or 7 keys to tearing down the walls in my life and I'll be on my way! That's why legalism is so attractive to us: we feel like we're *doing something* to get ourselves to heaven. If I can just keep the rules, do good things, and be better than the majority of other people, God can't help but let me into heaven. We would rather have control than have to trust God's power to do it.

There's nothing left but the shouting... the shouts didn't make the walls come down, they declared that God was going to do what only God could do. The strategy God gave them was believe in Him. It's the same strategy for tearing down walls He gives to us today. God – and only God! - has the power to make the walls in our lives and in our world fall down! Pray, believe, have faith, depend on God. "But I want to do something to make those walls come down! I need control, I need to take matters into my hands..."

We need to get this straight: we don't have the power to make those walls come down. Only God does. But that doesn't mean we don't have a part to play. Our part is to have the faith to obey God.

2. Faith puts us in the right place to see God's power

In chapter 5 Joshua asked, "What does my Lord say to his servant?" The Lord told Joshua exactly what to do: circle Jericho.

Blast the trumpets. Don't talk. Place the ark of the covenant (representing God's presence) in the center of the procession.

None of this physically pressed on the wall, but it put Joshua and Israel in the right place to see God do what only God can do. The generation before them lived and died never seeing the land God promised to give them because they didn't believe.

The name of this series is A Journey of Faith. That's what the Christian life is: a journey of faith, of believing God, of putting our lives and hopes and dreams in God's hands.

What's in your wall?

Capital One had a memorable tagline that asked, *what's in your wallet?* Maybe God is asking a similar question: what's in your wall? What lies are blocking you from entering a new place with God?

- Fear?
- Guilt?
- Bitterness?
- Loneliness?
- Doubt in God's goodness?
- Insecurity?
- Anger?

Are you ready to believe that God can tear that wall down? Before you say "yes", ask yourself, what steps of obedience is the Lord asking of you? Are you ready to say, like Joshua, "what does the Lord say to His servant?"

Two new lands I believe the Lord calling us as a church to take are, first of all, deeper relational connections (Bible calls fellowship). Are there walls keeping you from connecting relationally with others? God wants to help you tear those walls down! Maybe you're building a wall of isolation and Jesus is saying "I want to tear that wall down!" Believe God and do what He says – and watch what He does!

It's been so great, so encouraging to see different people stepping up and initiating different contexts to grow together and encourage each other in Christ and so many people responding.

Bon-fires and women's meetings and men's meetings and community groups and the like have been wonderful opportunities to grow in friendship and encourage each other in our walks with the Lord. There is new relational land for us to take, let's take it together by the power and grace of our Lord!

The other "new" land is an expanded outreach to our community with the gospel. God calls us to take the gospel to those who don't know Jesus so the walls of sin can be torn down and a bridge of love built between them and God the Father. When the walls of Jericho came down, Joshua commanded the men to guard Rahab and her family, keeping them safe. God has given us a message and mission of mercy and we want to be on the lookout for Rahabs that we can share the good news of Jesus Christ with!

We are excited to begin to lay out plans for 2020 that will build on each other for making gospel connections with our community. So stay tuned and be ready to be a part of that cause we really need to do it together!

As we close, let's remember the important place that prayer has in seeing walls come down. There is no wall that God can't pull down, and prayer is our greatest weapon. So church, let's pray together.