

FAITH TRUSTS THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN – JOSHUA 5:13-6:5, 20

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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?" "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?" 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. Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. 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. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in." When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

How many of you have seen the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*? I was never one of those Indiana Jones junkies, but I liked the movies well enough, especially the last of the original trilogy. Do you remember toward the end of the movie what Indiana Jones had to do? In order to get to the holy grail, Jones had to make it through three tests, or traps that were guarding the grail. The third of these tests was to make a leap of faith across a chasm of about 30 feet. There would be no way that any human, even an Olympic long jumper, could jump that distance. Jones "had faith" and was able to cross. If you want to know exactly how, watch the movie (or ask someone who has watched it).

Joshua had to put his faith in something a little bit different than Indiana Jones did in the movie. Joshua was the newly appointed and anointed leader of Israel and he was preparing to lead the Israelites into the land God had promised to them. Only one thing stood in his way, the imposing city of Jericho, the gateway city to the promised land. It was required of Joshua to put his faith in the Lord's plan. The same thing goes for Christians today. Sure, we are not facing the prospect of toppling down a fortified city, but we are faced with the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. These three enemies alone give us enough reason to need faith. FAITH TRUSTS IN THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN.

1. Because it's superior
2. Because it's completed

(1)

Last week we heard how the Lord's blessing was given to the people of Israel and what a wonderful blessing it is. That blessing was given toward the beginning of their 40 years of wandering in

the desert. The lesson from God's Word this morning from Joshua picks it up right at the end of the Israelites' wandering in the desert. Moses, who had been Israel's leader for 40 years, was not allowed to enter into the promised land, so he appointed Joshua to succeed him as leader of Israel. The Israelites had crossed into the land through the Jordan River, in a similar miracle to the parting of the Red Sea forty years earlier. Now they were face to face with their destiny, with conquering the promised land, and the first city that stood in their way was Jericho.

The people of Canaan had heard about the triumphs of the Israelites and their God, and might have been a little bit fearful. There was a reason that Jericho was walled up and fortified. They were defending against the Israelites. But the Israelites were not prepared for siege warfare. So we come to Joshua, Israel's new leader pondering battle strategies of how to take this city. **"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."** This wasn't what Joshua was expecting. Was this warrior on the side of the Israelites and would help conquer the city, or was he an enemy?

The man answers, "No," this wasn't the purpose he was there talking with Joshua, but rather **"as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."** The name of the Lord was not thrown around lightly. The Lord, with the small caps "ORD" was God's name. The name he had given to Moses in the burning bush, the name he had given at Mt. Sinai. The God of free and faithful love. At the sound of the name of the Lord, Joshua bowed down in reverence. Joshua knew the man standing before him was superior to him as commander of the forces of the Lord. What he didn't know was just how much superior.

"What message does my lord have for his servant?" At this time, Joshua doesn't yet know that his man is the Lord himself, the God of heaven and earth. But the man's next word's gave it away, **"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."** Does this sound familiar? It should, because this is exactly what happened to Moses when he stood before the burning bush. It would take more than a mere angel messenger to make the ground holy, it was because the Lord God Almighty was there. The God who created the heavens and the earth, the God who could destroy Joshua with a snap of his fingers. This was God who was standing before Joshua.

Can you imagine what trembling Joshua would have been feeling, being in the presence of a holy and righteous God? We have nothing to compare it to. And for what purpose was the God of Israel making a personal visit to Joshua? To confide in him the battle plan for taking the city of Jericho. This plan was very simple. God would do everything, the Israelites would do nothing, nothing as far as taking the city. The Israelites were just to walk around the city once a day for six days. And then on the seventh day they were to start at dawn and walk around the city seven times, and when the ram's horns blasted they would give a shout, and 'the walls would come a-tumblin' down.'

What kind of a battle plan is that? Couldn't God think up something a little bit better? These may have been a few of the thoughts running through Joshua's mind, I know I certainly would be thinking these things. Jericho was a walled city, with walls several feet thick. How could blowing a few horns and the shouts of the army of Israel knock them down? The obvious answer, they couldn't, and they didn't. What knocked down the walls of Jericho? It was the Lord, the commander of the armies in heaven, he

was the one who knocked those walls down. And Joshua had faith, FAITH TRUSTS THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN, because it is superior.

Look at the example of faith we have in the gospel for this morning. There, a centurion had a servant who had fallen ill. He heard Jesus was in town and knew that Jesus was able to heal him, the centurion had faith that Jesus was able to heal his servant. There were a bunch of people who came up to Jesus saying that he should help this man – he was a good man, he helped the Jews out a lot. If anyone deserves help, this guy does. But faith and grace don't work like that. And the centurion knew it, he knew he didn't deserve to have Jesus come to his house, he didn't even deserve to have his servant healed, but he put his faith in Jesus, he trusted in the Lord's plan.

How often may we act like those people who approached Jesus and say, "God should do this...because he deserves it/she deserves it/I deserve it?" How often has God's plan for this world made sense to us? We look at the tragedy that befalls individuals, towns, our country and wonder what God's plan is for all of this. God's battle plan seems to take all the fun out of living: waiting for sex until marriage, not giving in to any lustful temptations, forgiving others who wrong you, giving your hard earned cash to God willingly. God's plan doesn't make sense when we baptize babies, when nothing we do counts for anything. I can't even turn to God. That doesn't make any sense. And yet that is God's plan.

And while we can go on and on "improving" God's plan, just stop. Forget about your plans, and trust in God's plan, as strange as it may seem to us. God's been around a lot longer than we have. That's what Joshua did. Instead of doubting this harebrained scheme God came up with, he trusted in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He trusted in the God who guided them through the desert and into the promised land. FAITH TRUSTS THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN because it is superior. While we try to make sense of every little problem in our life, God had his eye on the bigger problem – sin. The Lord's battle plan was simple. One person would exchange his perfect life, for the sins of the world.

This is the superior battle plan of our God. A battle plan that is not just concerned about the here and the now, but it is concerned about all time. "[God] **wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.**" The truth that Jesus Christ is the only way we can get to heaven. But to force this knowledge on people wouldn't work, it would be like trying to force freedom on people. And the only people who recognize this freedom of God are believers, whom the Holy Spirit has worked in their hearts.

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The Holy Spirit worked in Joshua's heart to trust God's battle plan. "**Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands.'**" Did you listen carefully to those words the Lord spoke to Joshua. "**I have delivered Jericho.**" At this point in time, before the walls had come tumbling down, Jericho is already defeated. In God's mind, this battle is as good as done, it is finished. FAITH TRUSTS THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN...because it is completed.

If it was completed, why did God bother sending the Israelites for exercise around the city? It wasn't the prancing around the city that made the walls fall down, it wasn't the trumpets that made the walls fall down, it was God. These instructions for the battle were not for God's benefit, as if he needed the Israelites to do anything, they were for the Israelites' benefit, to reinforce that this victory belonged to the Lord. The Israelites marched around Jericho for seven days blowing their trumpets – a sign of God's

presence, they gave a loud shout on the seventh day and the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, the city was defeated. It was completed, just as God had said.

FAITH TRUSTS THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN, because it is complete. The Israelites were reminded that whenever the Lord is there, all his plans succeed. God had said they would take the land of Canaan, and the first city to be destroyed was Jericho. It was as good as done in God's eyes. For God's people today it is the same way. God's battle plan is completed: Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. The first two are done, the third is as good as done in God's eyes. It is a completed battle plan, the victory is won, there is nothing more we need to do, there is nothing more we need to worry about. **"If God is for us who can be against us?..For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

And you know the cool thing about the Bible? It is all the reminders that it gives to believers of this assured victory. We are God's New Testament people, we have a promised land we are waiting to enter – heaven. And we know we will get there, because we have a God who is guiding us, we have a God who is directing us. And if we look in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter of the Bible we see this, **"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed."**

The trumpet is a reminder of the presence of God. That last trumpet will be God coming to call us home. What a joyous reminder that is for us. FAITH TRUSTS THE LORD'S BATTLE PLAN, because it's superior, because it's completed. Amen!