

## “THE BATTLE OF JERICHO”

Scripture: Joshua 6:12-21

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On this Memorial Day Sunday, I want to share with you about one of the great men of God. His name was Joshua. Joshua was a man of great faith and a man of great courage that we can learn a great deal from his example. I want to pick up the story, and I will be retelling it, but I want to pick it up with Joshua, chapter 6, beginning with verse 12, as they are preparing for the battle of Jericho.

*12 Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 13 The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the LORD and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets kept sounding. 14 So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.*

*15 On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. 16 The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! 17 The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. 18 But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. 19 All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."*

*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. 21 They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it--men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.*

One of the magazines I look forward to that comes each month is *Our State Magazine*. They had an article a while back; I can't remember the date, but I do remember the title of the article: it was "To Find Courage", and it was written by Jimmy Tomlin. It was about Jack Lucas. Jack Lucas was 13 years old when World War II started and he wanted to join the Marines bad but they didn't want 13 year olds. But when he was 14 years old he finally convinced them that he was 17 and so he went into service. On February 20, 1945, on Iwo Jima, he and three of his buddies were taking cover and his rifle jammed, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise because he looked down and there were two hand grenades there in front of one of his friends. Just instinctively, he fell upon one of the hand grenades and then took his rifle and pushed the other one down in the sand so it wouldn't have such an impact. Well, amazingly, he survived. He said, "I have about a hundred holes in me and eight pieces of shrapnel in my head." He said when his mother found out she said, "Well, I always knew he was hardheaded." But he survived

and he was given the Medal of Honor by President Truman several months after that and he wears it today, especially in honor, as he says, of his buddies that paid the ultimate sacrifice. Many examples, we can see of courage, especially in the military that we give thanks for today.

And I wanted to share with you about a man who was drafted into service with little experience to lead the Children of Israel, but he was a man, not only a warrior, not only a military man, but a great leader whose name was Joshua. And especially today, when I think of people today, one of the great needs we have is courage; we need encouragement and oftentimes the way that comes is: God pours courage into our hearts. Especially we are inspired by other people, and especially by God Himself that we have the courage to do His will and to face what God gives us and not just endure, but as the Apostle Paul says, “to be more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

I wanted to first of all share with you about Joshua, and that Joshua learned courage from a great, great man named Moses. In the story that I read, you see this middle-aged man that is a great leader of the Children of Israel, but you need to step back and see how he got there. Joshua, first of all, is introduced in three little stories that I want to share with you about. How did this man become such a courageous man, such a great leader? First of all, in Exodus, chapter 17, God has done great things among the Children of Israel. Plagues have come upon the nation of Egypt; He delivered them from Pharaoh; they have crossed the Red Sea, but now, as they go into the Promised Land, everybody wants them there, especially the Amalekites, and so they got into battle right away. The Israelites don't have battle experience. Joshua does not have military experience; he is a brick mason, like everyone else, but Moses sees something in Joshua, and led of God, he taps Joshua to lead the militia.

One of the things that you read in Exodus, chapter 17, it's an unusual battle in that the battle is going on down in the valley. But first of all, Joshua learns that courage comes through obedience and trust. When you are asked to do something and you think God is leading you to do it, you do it. But also, he learned the power of intercessory prayer because here, Moses and Aaron and Hur, they can't fight in the battle, but they fight the battle in prayer. They go up on the mountain. Moses raised his hands and prays, and he gets tired. When the hands go down, Aaron and Hur catch on — they start losing. So Aaron and Hur pull up a rock and they hold up Moses' hands and holds them up all day and he prays, and Joshua and the people of Israel are victorious.

So Joshua learns early on that it important to trust God and obey God and it very important to have prayer, people praying for you. Certainly it is a lesson for us today, that we lift up our military in prayer. But we lift up, especially, all of God's people because we are in a spiritual warfare and we need, especially the power of intercessory prayer. Joshua learned that early on.

And then we find in Exodus 32, Joshua is Moses' assistant and he goes up to Mt. Sinai with him to get the Ten Commandments. He doesn't go all the way up there, as Moses does. He waits about midway. It's a very honored position. He doesn't know how long he's going to wait, but he waits. It ends up being 40 days. Joshua waited well; he waited in prayer. He learned what Isaiah said, that:

*“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as ea-*

*gles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint"*

One other little story, in Numbers 13 and 14: God hasn't given up on the Israelites yet. He still has hopes of them going into the Promised Land and taking the land, so there was a spy mission. Joshua was one of the twelve that's chosen to go in and spy out the land — the land flowing with milk and honey. They come back. The majority of the report is like a lot of times what we do: they see the problems; they are real good at telling you what the problems are.

They are real good at telling the people, "Those people are giants. We seem like grasshoppers. I know God's wanting us to go into the Promised Land, but I don't know if we're going to be able to go up against them."

But two men have a minority report. They are Joshua and Caleb and they say, "It is a beautiful land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. God's going to be with us. That's how we can go in and take the land."

Well, Joshua and Caleb are really in the minority and they are ready to stone Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb, and finally God has to intervene. As it turned out, of that great population, only two people went into the Promised Land from there, and that was Joshua and Caleb. And Joshua learned early on that God gives courage to people that are willing to be different, and when they see problems, they don't see them just as they are; they see them with God. And all things are possible.

Think for a few moments: Whose life of courage has inspired you to make those difficult decisions and do those things that you believe, in God's sight, are the right thing? John McCain, in *Faith of the Fathers*, recalls a high school teacher. (How many of us have had a teacher that has meant a lot to us? We may not have said anything to them, but they really had an impact on our lives.) He was at boarding school and, coming from a military family, he was used to moving all around and so — it's not like many of us, like I grew up in Charlotte and knew what it was like to live in a community throughout — same schools and things like that. But this man, named William Ravenal inspired the young man in that boarding school. He taught him Shakespeare and they actually liked Shakespeare with him. He was a football coach, but especially he was a man that not only taught the subject, but his morals, his values came through.

He said one instance he really remembered, one of his players broke the rules on the football team. If you went by the letter of the law he would have been kicked off the team. They had a team meeting and John McCain felt that, yes, there should be something done, but that was too severe. He was urging a lighter sentence upon this young man. His coach, William Ravenal, kind of sat back, but after the meeting, those twenty or thirty were swayed to impose a lighter sentence. As he came out of that meeting Mr. Ravenal shook his hand, told him how proud he was of him and said, "I really was hoping that was the way it would happen but I needed for it to be a team decision."

He says that he thought back, especially when he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, that this was one of those who inspired him to do the right thing and it was very disappointing when he was released that, at age 53, a couple of years before, Mr. Ravenal, had passed away. But think of

that: to be someone that you are remembered as having the kind of courage and the morals and the inspiration to inspire someone else. I just want to say, especially, that Joshua had that in Moses. Moses wasn't perfect, but Moses certainly did his job in getting Joshua ready to take his place. In fact, when he knew it was time for him to go he brought Joshua before the people and said, "This is now going to be your leader." Joshua was scared, but what it meant to Joshua that Moses had confidence in him.

The second thing I want to say today is that this courage that God gave to Joshua —he put it into action. It's one thing to be brave, but it's another to really put it into action and really do what God wants you to do. You can tell he's having trouble with his courage. In Joshua, chapter one, God has to tell him several times, "Be strong; be very courageous, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Have you ever followed a hard act, whether a job or somehow you have followed someone and they are a legend? That's what Joshua is having to face right now, where God is letting him know: I am going to give you the courage to lead these people. And he begins to lead them with strength and with courage and with power. He sends out a spy mission as well and they go out to Jericho and they go visit Rahab and Rahab is a prostitute, of all people, but as he goes into their home Rahab tells them that the people of Jericho are terrified of the Israelites. And that's good; that's what they want. And they hide the spies and they give the promise to Rahab that "when we come into Jericho, you will be spared, you and your whole household. Just put this red robe out here."

That is what happened and you look at the genealogy of Jesus Christ, here is Rahab who is in that genealogy. But Joshua marches forward and they cross the Jordan River and when they do that, the priests have to get their feet wet. It's kind of like when the Lord called to Peter. "Well, Lord, if it is you, let me come." You know, walking on the water, Peter gets his feet wet. He begins to walk toward the Lord. Well, the priests have to get their feet wet and the water parts. And what Joshua told each one of the twelve tribes of Israel: "Pick up a stone because when your children ask, 'What do these stones mean?' I want you to remind them how God was with us this day and led us into the Promised Land in miraculous fashion." He wanted them to have a faith memory.

One of the great things, especially when we serve a Church — almost 160 years of heritage in this Church — what a faith heritage we have and what a great blessing that is.

Joel Osteen is, to me, one who has been put into a place that you would have never expected. This is a young man whose father was a pastor of the Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, a large church when he was serving it. He passed away in 1999. His son was serving in the TV ministry — not a pastor — but they tapped him to lead that church. Since 1999 with this young man at the helm, the attendance has quadrupled. He has written a best selling book, and one of the things that he realizes: He is not trying to be his dad; he is trying to be who God has called him to be. He says oftentimes we need faith eyes.

He says it this way:

Break out of your self-imposed prison. One of the common slogans among men and

women who are serving long sentences in federal prisons is: 'You've got nothing coming.' It's a sad hopeless statement, robbing the inmates of what little hope they have left. You've got no income. Your kids are embarrassed to say they are related to you. Your wife isn't coming to see you and she will probably divorce you before too long. Nothing is going to change in your life. Don't expect anything better. You're getting what you deserve. You've got nothing coming.

Sadly, many people on the outside are living behind self-imposed bars, in prisons of their own making, have succumbed to the same type of thinking: This is the best you can expect. It isn't going to get any better so you might as well sit down, keep quiet and endure it.

He says:

No. You can break out of that prison. The door is unlocked. All you have to do is start expecting good things in your life. Start believing God for a great future. You do have great things coming.

Joshua is leading his people to have just a different mentality. They have been slaves all this time but now God is calling, "This is a new day. You are the chosen generation to go into the Promised Land; you need to act like it."

And so the battle strategy is given. It's unusual. They are supposed to march around the city once a day for six days. On the seventh day they are to march around seven times. Thirteen times. Do you think it's unlucky? Well, it was unlucky for Jericho. It's an unusual battle strategy. Reminds me of Gideon. Gideon was cowering in a cave, thrashing out because he was afraid of the Midianites. An angel appeared to him. "Behold you mighty man of valor."

And Gideon wondered, who is he talking to? But, see, that is the way God saw Gideon. And then, when Gideon finally was convinced that he was supposed to lead his nation and he asked for volunteers, 30,000 came forth! God thought — that's too many; you are going to think you did it, so let's weed them out. So, he finally gets it down to 3,000. It's still too many for God so God finally weeds it down to 300. Gideon is still willing to lead them and he leads them into getting jars with a torch and an ambush at night and they are victorious! But the whole point of that unusual strategy was that He wanted Gideon to know that it is the Lord that grants victory. Well, they enact a plan. They follow the plan and all because they have this attitude of victory.

I was reading about the lady that's driving today in the Indianapolis 500 — Danica Patrick, 24 years old, only the fourth woman to drive in the Indianapolis 500. A former high school cheerleader, she's got a lot of spunk and grit. You know, they think it's just tremendous that she is even in the race; she didn't think it's tremendous just to be in the race: she plans to win. She has this attitude of victory.

That's what happens when God comes into our hearts. Joshua had this attitude of victory and wanted to win, and so they march around the city on that day. Seven times. The walls come down. The victory is complete. It's because God was with them.

How do you need God's courage in your life today? Oftentimes, if I ask myself that question, I have to think: well, what am I afraid of? First of all, what are your fears? What are those things that you are anxious about, that you wake up in the night, that you are praying about and you may wonder, "God, do You really hear me?" But you go ahead and say it out loud to the Lord. You face your fears. And then, you take it to the Lord in prayer and you stand upon His promises. The promise I especially like is from Matthew 11 that says:

*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

The other one that I love to stand upon is from 2 Timothy where He tells Timothy that:

*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of sound mind.*

And God begins to give us courage to face whatever we need to face. For you see, the greatest example we have of courage is our Lord Jesus Christ, as He went to the cross. From what I've read about the cross, He died in a fashion that was very different from other people that were crucified: He didn't die kicking, screaming, swearing, spitting. He died with great courage. He died as, "I have chosen to give My life. I have chosen to lay down My life. And He died with great courage. He died saying, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And He said, "My work is finished." Jesus, because He loves us, died upon the cross for us.

One of the great saints of the Church is named Martin Luther. Martin Luther had an interesting spiritual pilgrimage. He gave his life to the Lord during a thunder storm. It was one of those — "Lord, if you will get me out of this, I will serve You." He went into a monastery and was about as good as you could be at trying hard to earn God's approval. But as he began to teach the scriptures and interpret the scriptures into common, everyday language, he began to understand a word in here that he wasn't hearing and never had experienced. It's called *grace*. He began to realize: We are saved by grace, not by works. And he was never the same. We know him not only for his preaching and being the leader of the Reformation, but he called God a mighty fortress. He said:

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing;  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.*

Let us pray.

*O Lord, grant us courage. Grant us faith for the living of these days. For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*