

Faith Confronts Jericho

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[0:00] Joshua 6. 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 all the people give a loud shout. Then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.

So Joshua, son of Nun, called the priests and said to them, Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it. And he ordered the people advance, march around the city with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.

When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them.

The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time, the trumpets were sounding.

[1:32] But Joshua had commanded the people, Do not give a war cry. Do not raise your voices. Do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout.

Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the Lord.

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.

So on the second day, they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. 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.

The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, Shout, for the Lord has given you the city. The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord.

[2:45] Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared because she hid the spies we sent. 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. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.

When the trumpet 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.

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.

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her in accordance with your oath to her.

[3:53] So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belong to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.

Then they burned the whole city and everything in it. But they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and irons into the treasury of the Lord's house. But Joshua spared Rahab, the prostitute, with her family and all who belong to her because she hid the men Joshua sent as spies to Jericho.

And she lives among the Israelites to this day. At that time, Joshua pronounced this solemn oath. Cursed before the Lord is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho.

At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations. At the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates. So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the land.

I really want to sing a particular song. You've heard the song, Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down.

[5:14] It's both right and wrong. Joshua was there. The walls did come tumbling down, but it really wasn't much of a battle, was it?

Joshua certainly didn't do much fighting. The big hero in the story is God. He's the hero. And it's not a story of military prowess or strategy and cunning.

It's a story about faith, reliance, hope in God's word and who God is and God's grace. It really is a story about trust.

It's a story about faith. You don't need to take my word for it, though. The book of Hebrews gives a divine commentary on Joshua chapter 6. And so listen to the book of Hebrews.

So what brought down the walls of Jericho? So what brought down the walls of Jericho?

[6:30] What saved Rahab's life? It was faith. Faith. And now we have to get this right. It's not that faith has a power of its own.

It's not that faith has hands or any strength of its own. It's God. It's God who did those things.

Who spared Rahab. Who made the walls fall down. But it was hope. It was trust. It was these Israelites, as they're believing in God, it called God into action.

They believed in His goodness and His power and His love. And God responds to that. And so faith calls God into action. And so faith lays a hold of an infinite and eternal and gracious God.

And that's why Jesus says the smallest faith will move a mountain. And again, we need to understand that properly.

[7:34] The faith doesn't move mountains all by itself. It's because that smallest faith leans into a mountain-moving God. And when we lean into Him, He responds.

And so that's what we're looking at here in Joshua 6. Faith is the question. What was the question 40 years ago? 40 years previous to this.

It was, is God going to deliver this land or not? Can we trust Him or not? They went in, they saw the, they sent in spies, and they saw it was full of cities and kings and giants.

And the question was, would they believe God? Would they trust in Him? Would they rely on Him? Would they depend upon His word? Would they trust His character, His goodness, His heart?

And they didn't. They didn't. But their children did. Their children did. And so Jericho's fall is all about faith.

[8 : 34] And that's where it meets us. That's where it connects with your life and my life. So what does a living, active, saving faith in God look like? What does it do?

What kind of faith is God calling us to? Because it is the same faith that Hebrews is encouraging us to. So what is the kind of faith that God is calling me to?

In Joshua 6, there's four lessons. We're only going to get to the first lesson about faith today. And Lord willing, we'll do the next three next week.

But the first lesson about what saving, living, active faith looks like and does is, you see it in verse 1. And I just want to point your attention to there.

And there we see that faith confronts. Faith confronts and throws down closed cities. That's what faith does. It confronts and throws down closed cities.

[9 : 41] And that's really the whole chapter in a nutshell. That's the whole big lesson of Joshua 6. And so you can look at verse 1. Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites.

No one went out and no one came in. And so there's Jericho. It's closed up. It's ready for battle. It's prepared for siege. It's shut up.

Supplies have been brought in. Men are standing on the walls. The gates are shut fast. So Jericho is this formidable city.

Not easily taken. Not easily taken. And that is the city that God says, now I'm going to hand it to you. I'm going to give it to you. This is God's grace in action.

This is, Jericho is a gift of grace to the people of Israel. And so by faith, Israel confronts that city, faces it, and believes. And this is the wonderful thing.

[10 : 41] They believe what God says. They believe that God is going to give it to them. So again, what are the two questions that faith is always answering?

Whenever you're faced with a situation, whenever faith is called into action, it's always answering two questions. The first is, what has God promised?

And what is God's heart? It's always answering those questions one and the same time. What has he said? And what is he like? So Israel comes to Jericho.

And the question is, what has God promised about this city? Well, faith looks for a word.

And God has said, I'm going to give you this land. He's promised it to them by word. He's promised it to them by covenant. Remember the last chapter? The whole idea of circumcision was, now it's a reaffirmation that the land is yours.

[11 : 42] And so faith looks for this word. It looks for this promise from God. What has God said about this? And then faith believes it. But more than that, faith looks at God's heart.

What kind of God is he? What do I know about him? What kind of, how does he love us? What are his feelings towards us? What does he think about us? What are his plans for us?

What is his character? And really, that is the foundation of faith. Israel had had the word before. Remember, 40 years ago, God told that first generation that he would give them the land if they would go up.

But they didn't believe him. Do you remember what they said about God? Do you remember what they said? They said, you brought us out of Egypt to destroy us.

You just brought us out here and now we're into this country and they're too much for us. This is something malicious. God, you're not strong enough then to deliver it.

[12 : 48] You're not good enough to deliver it. You put us into an impossible situation. So the only thing that is left for us is if we attack them, we're going to suffer. Do you ever say that?

God, you put me into an impossible situation. Sounds like unbelief. They didn't believe him. So what were they saying about God's character and his heart?

Well, God is mean. God is cruel. God is capricious. God is not good. He's not kind. He's not dependable. See, unbelief is always saying something about God. Unbelief always believes something about God that he's not good or that he's not strong.

But what does faith say about God? Living faith says God is good. He is dependable. He's going to do what he says. He's kind. He loves me. I can trust him.

He means well to me. His heart is for me. And so here Israel is. Jericho is closed up. Ready for war. It's not to be taken by an army.

[13:54] They confront the city. By faith, they confront it and they say, God will throw this city down and give it to us. And that's what Hebrews is saying.

By faith, the walls of Jericho fell. Israel didn't run away this time. Israel didn't chicken out.

Israel didn't doubt God. Israel didn't grumble against God. They didn't balk this time. They confronted this closed up city. And when faced with that city, they looked past the walls.

And they looked past the soldiers. And they saw a God who was going to give it to them. Their eyes fastened upon him. And they believed God's word.

And they believed God's character. And their response, and in response to their faith, God acted on their behalf.

[14:53] He acted for them. In verse 20, it says that the walls collapsed. In verse 5, it says they will collapse.

In verse 20, it says they did collapse. Literally, it's the walls will fall down under themselves. And it's kind of a strange way of saying it. But I think the idea is that the bottom of the wall is going to give out.

And they're literally going to fall in under themselves. The idea is that there's going to be this great pressure, as it were, from above. And you know, if you stand up a book, we'll say on its edge, and you push down on it really hard, what happens is the bottom comes out.

And it falls flat. And that's what we have here. God acted on their behalf. At the sound of the shout, the walls didn't fall down because the trumpets were so loud.

The walls didn't fall down because the shout was so loud. They fell down because God from heaven pressed upon those walls, and they went out from underneath them. Their very foundation slipped out.

[16:08] It was God responding to their faith. And so I want you to put yourself in the place of these Israelites. As they are marching around the city, they're just not going for a stroll.

They're not just looking at the birds or whatever. What they are doing is they are believing God. As they marched around seven times on that last day, they were saying to themselves, God is going to give us the city.

These walls are coming down. God is going to give us the city. God loves us. He's going to do this for us. And as they walked, they walked with expectation.

They walked with this raised hope. So the walls are high and thick, but they're going to give away to God. That's what it means by faith.

The walls fell. The Israelites were believing and trusting God for this. And the story is written in such a way that the suspense builds until that, it builds day after day, time after time, as they march along.

[17:14] And as that story builds, and as they march along, their faith is growing. Their expectation is growing. Their hope is growing. That's what faith does. It sees what's going to happen from afar.

And as that gets closer, anticipation rises. We're closer than we were the day before. And then with a shout, in a moment, God pushed the walls down and the city was theirs.

So faith confronts and throws down closed cities. One early church father, John Chrysostom, said, assuredly, the sound of trumpets is unable to cast down stones.

Though one blow for 10,000 years, but faith can do all things. I just read in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said to a father of a demon-possessed boy, now put yourself again into that man's shoes.

Demon-possessed boy. So can you imagine the terror, the difficulty, the horror of that father's life? That was his closed-up city.

[18:36] Jesus said, how long has he been this way from childhood? This is a closed-up city. This was his Jericho. The man says, it's often thrown him, the demon has thrown him into the fire or the water to kill him, but if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.

And Jesus' response was, if you can, everything is possible for him who believes. And the man says, I do believe.

Help my unbelief. And then what happened? Jesus acted. That boy was healed. That was his Jericho and the walls fell.

His faith confronted a closed-up city. Something too hard for him. His faith confronted something that was too impossible for him. His faith confronted Satan's evil, Satan's stubborn hold on his son.

And his faith looked through that to Jesus and saw that, you know what? Jesus can help. And he's willing to help. And his faith reached out and with great power and love, Jesus responded.

[19:47] And that's what faith does. It doesn't balk at closed cities. Faith is not a peacetime virtue. Faith is made for the battle. Faith is made for the hard things.

Faith is useful in those times. It confronts those things. It marches up to closed cities. It walks around those cities, not with a rising sense of doom and gloom.

Not with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Saying this is just too hard. It's too much.

But faith looks on those problems with expectation. With hope. And it says, what has God said about this?

What is God like? And it believes. And so brothers and sisters, what are your closed up cities? What are your Jerichos?

[20:51] Where does this world push against your faith? Where are there Canaanites taunting you as you face this city?

Maybe it's your own sin. Indwelling sin can be very much a closed up city to us.

Some sins are very stubborn. And they have the tendency to taunt God's word and God's character. And they seem to say, God is not going to sanctify you.

This is hopeless. hopeless. In the Sunday school hour, we're talking about addictions. And one of the strongest chains that wraps and ties up the addict is the chain of hopelessness that says, I can't change.

There's no point. There's no way forward. But faith confronts sin. And it overthrows it.

[22:00] It answers those two questions. What has God said? What has God said? Well, God's word says that the one who's in me is stronger than the one who's in the world.

God says, I will purify you from all uncleanness. God says, you're dead to sin. You're free. You've been free. You need to live in your freedom.

Faith hears and then it believes. And then it asks the question, well, what is my God like? What is my God like when I'm faced with this stubborn sin?

Well, it says he's holy. So I can't take that sin lightly, but it says he is holy and he makes men holy. holy. And he disciplines us that we might share in his holiness.

And then I think of Psalm 25, I think it is, it says he is good and therefore he teaches sinners his way. God is good and therefore he teaches sinners his way.

[23:10] It's not God is good and therefore he leaves sinners and abandons them. And so are you hiding from your indwelling sin?

Are you hiding from your stubborn sin? Disheartened, hopeless, feeling despair and beaten and thinking the best way to deal with it is not to deal with it. And then my question is where is your faith? What has God said?

What is God like? So faith isn't for those days of ease. It confronts closed cities and throws them down. Maybe your closed up city is just some hard providence, hard trial, difficult trial and there it is and it's as formidable and as unmovable as Jericho.

You can no more move this trial out of your life than you can move Jericho out of your way. And it doesn't give way. You've tried going one way and it's met you. You've gone the other way and it's there.

You can't go over it. You can't go under it. You wake up to it. You go to sleep to it. It's a closed closed up city. But again, those two questions meet you.

[24:20] Those questions of faith. What has God said? And what is God like? What has God promised about hard things? That together they'll work for our good.

God has promised that He disciplines those He loves. hard providences, hard trials can be part of that disciplining training process.

So think of boot camp. Not all discipline is in response to some particular sin. Some discipline is just you go through it because you need to go through it.

It builds up your strength. It gives, takes care of these problems. And so it's like boot camp. It's not easy, but it's necessary. And again, God disciplines those He loves that they might share in His holiness.

So what has God said about that trial? That this trial is going to work for your holiness. that miserable situation that won't give way.

[25:32] God says, as painful as that is, I'm doing it that you might be like me. That you might be like me. And that's what He says.

And faith walks around that trial day after day and sometimes seven times in a day. And it walks around it with a rising expectation that God is going to use this for my good.

this is for my good. I am going to say it was good for me to be afflicted. Unbelief says, with Jacob, everything is against me.

And faith says, everything is for me. Job, who was in an extremely bad situation, he said, speaking of the Lord, He knows the way I take.

That's a sweet promise. He knows the way I take. He knows the road I'm on. He knows where I've been. He knows where I'm going. And He knows where I am right now. And then the next part of that verse says, and when it's done, I shall come forth as gold.

[26:46] So when I come through this, I'm going to come forth shining like gold. So how does faith answer the question? What is God like in this hard providence?

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust. Faith looks and sees God's heart.

Good fathers, good fathers, understand their children's weaknesses and take it into account. Good fathers don't forget that their children can be easily discouraged or disheartened.

But we do know that even the best of human fathers get this wrong sometimes. We forget and we become harsh or inconsiderate.

We don't take into account that they are children and how they are made. But faith sees a perfect father. A perfect father who never gets this wrong.

[27:52] He never misunderstands or misjudges our breaking point. He knows what we can bear and what is just too much for us to bear. He knows what we can bear by faith and then He knows it's just going to be too much for them.

Faith sees that. So faith is the most powerful instrument in the world. I mean, we're amazed at CT scans and we're amazed at MRI machines and we're amazed at ultrasounds.

But faith leaves them all far behind because faith has the ability to even look into the heart of God and see what His heart is like. Faith maps accurately our Father's love and His compassion.

First children. Faith sees God's presence. God's not far away from us in our difficulties. You know what unbelief is like?

It's like being farsighted where you can't see the things that are right in front of you, close to you. Unbelief doesn't see the God who is right there, who is right here with me.

[29:07] But faith does. God who says, I am at your right hand. I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear, I will help you.

Faith sees God as close and willing to help in those difficult things. So again, maybe, what is your closed up city?

Indwelling sin, that's a city that we all face with. Some stubborn sin, faith confronts it and overcomes it. Maybe it's hard trials, the things of life that hurt.

Maybe that's your closed up city. Maybe it's the hostility to the gospel. Maybe it's your children's, even their hard-heartedness. And just like Jericho, the gates are shut up tight.

And there's soldiers all around that city and no one goes out and no one comes in and it feels like more and more they are out of our reach. There used to be coming and going.

[30:20] There used to be a city wide open to us. We used to be able to have a conversation that would seem like it would go somewhere, but now they're shut. And it is heartbreaking. And it is terrifying.

And it's so tempting to want to give up and it's so tempting to want to think that it's over, that's it, they've had their chance, now they've gone too far to think that we know God's plan or His purposes.

But faith doesn't give up because faith lays a hold of an omnipotent, all-powerful, and very gracious God. Has God overthrown and conquered closed up hearts before?

Has God graciously given parents their children's souls just like God gave Jericho to the Israelites? I think the answer is yes.

Augustine, the early church father, he was not saved when he was young. He was 37. 37. And it wasn't like he had spent 37 years sort of nonchalantly going through life and he didn't know the gospel.

[31:32] He was a sinful man. He was a very smart man. He was a very studied man. It wasn't like he didn't know the gospel. He knew it and he had rejected it for 37 years.

And he had gone far, far down the road of sin. but so mothers and fathers, there he was like Jericho tightly, tightly shut up.

But his mother never stopped marching around him and praying for him. She didn't have a ram's horn but she had prayer. And she marched around her son again and again and she prayed and her prayers were blasting to heaven that whole time.

And her name was Monica and she didn't have the words to convince her son. She didn't have a battering ram into his heart. She didn't have that just right argument that would win or that just those right words to slip into her son's tightly shut up city.

But she had faith. She had faith in an omnipotent very gracious God and that sustained her in her prayers and in her faith.

[32 : 41] And at last God gave her her son. And listen to Augustine's confessions. She was filled with joy. We told her how it had happened and she exalted feeling it to be a triumph and blessed you.

He's speaking to God. Blessed you who are more powerful to do more than we ask or think. She saw that you had granted her far more than she had long been praying for in her unhappy and tearful groans.

You changed her grief to joy. So her faith didn't shrink back from that closed up city but marched around it day by day in prayer.

God is strong enough to break through those strongest walls. So let your children build those walls as high as they may be and let them fill those walls with soldiers and shut all the gates.

but there is a God who can press down upon the hardest heart and the highest walls and send them tumbling to the ground and faith sees that God.

[33 : 52] Faith lives upon that God. Faith leans into that God. Faith holds on to that God. So as we end I just have a homework assignment for you and it's in three parts.

And the first is just to answer a question what is your Jericho? What is your closed up shut up city in your life? I hit on some generally but what is yours specifically?

Maybe there's two or three. Maybe there's just one. But I want you to think of what comes to your mind when you say that is an immovable impenetrable city in my life.

And we want to apply this faith to something tangible in our lives. And so start by identifying that Jericho and then the second part of the homework assignment is once you've identified it what does God's word say about it?

What promises of God relate to it? What promises of God connect to it? Either to it directly or to me while I'm in it or to the situation.

[35 : 01] Faith is a believing response to God's word. It's a belief and a promise of what God has said. And so we want to find those promises that speak to that have reference to those Jerichos.

And it might take some work but do the work of finding those promises. The third part of the homework assignment is which one or which ones of God's attributes relate to your Jericho.

What does the character of God say about your Jericho? Or what does it have to do with that? Even probably better than that think of all of the attributes of God and relate each one of them.

What does his power say about this problem? What is his goodness? What is his grace? What is his mercy? What is his justice? What is his love? What is his omnipotence? What is his omnipresence?

And on and on. What does that say about my city? And related to that, what about the cross?

[36 : 18] What about the cross? The cross is the supreme example of God fulfilling his promise. And it's also the supreme explanation of his heart and his character.

So what does the cross have to say about it? Faith looks at everything through the cross. A few years ago we introduced you to that word cruciform, cross-shaped.

Faith is a cruciform grace. Grace. And people of faith are cross-shaped people. And so bring that Jericho that you've identified and bring it under the shadow of the cross.

Let the cross cast its shadow over that city. And I think what will happen is when you do, your faith will spring to life.

you'll find all kinds of promises become yes and amen in Jesus Christ because of the cross. So John Chrysostom was right.

[37 : 31] Trumpets cannot throw down stones, but faith can do all things. And so we need to pray with that Father. Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do believe. We do believe and yet we see vast areas of unbelief in our hearts and we see areas where we respond almost instinctually in unbelief.

And so we give you our hearts and we pray that you would unify our hearts that we might fear you. Unite our hearts that we might fear you and trust you.

that you might become bigger. Your promises might become more solid and more real that Jesus Christ and the cross and the gospel, those realities might become more and more tangible.

It's easy for us to see the cities in front of us and the hard things in front of us. Please give us eyes that we might see your glory, your power, your grace.

[38 : 40] they are real and they deserve to be appreciated. They deserve for us to trust in them and so I pray that you would help our unbelief overcome these doubting hearts and teach us to trust you for those who have not seen the glory of Jesus Christ and they're trying to go through this hard life all on their own.

Lord, we pray that you would push down those mountains or those walls and storm into their hearts with your light and with your truth.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.