

Joshua 5:13-6:27

The Battle of Jericho

July 18, 2021

We are going to Joshua chapter 5 today, continuing our study through Joshua this summer.

And as we open this book that we believe to be inspired by God, we are opening a book that was given to us primarily so that we could know things we couldn't know otherwise, mainly specifics about who God is and what God is like.

We can learn a lot about God from His creation, but the specifics about his character and nature and purpose and plan and the Gospel of Jesus required a written word that God has inspired here in the Bible so that we could know Him. So we always read asking mainly, "What does this tell me about God?" So look for Him and his nature as we go - what does this tell us about God that we wouldn't have known otherwise?

So at this point in the story, Joshua is leading the people into the land God had promised them, the land of Canaan. God had promised this land to the people of Israel 400 years earlier, but now it was time for them to claim that promise.

So they have crossed the Jordan river, and now they are facing the walled city of Jericho. It was the strongest city in the region. It was a walled city that was fortified heavily.

The strategy would be that they would take Jericho, and it was kind of the center of the Death Star - if you take out the strong city of Jericho then the rest of the land will fall more easily.

So they are about to see a huge victory in their quest for the land. Not to spoil the ending, but in the end the walls came tumbling down.

And in this account, we learn an awful lot about what God is like.

So they're right by Jericho, but before Joshua would lead them into that miraculous victory, he had to be prepared.

A pattern you see a few times in Joshua is that before God works mightily *through* His people, He works mightily *on* His people. They have to be properly aligned with Him.

Which is often true for us - often before God uses us to accomplish some of His purposes, he molds and shapes us. He humbles us and prepares us. He teaches us and puts us in our place, through all kinds of circumstances. So don't despise the days when God is humbling and shaping and teaching us through hard circumstances. They are often the preparation for the next thing.

So God is about to use Joshua to lead the people in mighty ways just like He did Moses before him, God will do a work through Joshua, but first He is going to do a work on Joshua:

Joshua 5:13 13 When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"

So Joshua sees a man with a drawn sword, a man ready for battle. And Joshua asks him the question we all might ask a guy with a drawn sword who appears miraculously in front of us: "Are you on my team?" Team Jericho or Team Israel?

Look at his response in verse 14:

14 And he said, "No;

He doesn't accept those two categories, he doesn't accept that he is going to be choosing one of those two sides. It's like when the kids ask, "Should we have candy or ice cream for dinner" and you just respond, "NO. I didn't agree to those two options."

Whoever this mysterious man is, he isn't going to fit neatly in Joshua's categories. He isn't going to let Joshua tell him that he has to be in one of two lanes. He is above all that.

And the reason is because of who he is:

14 And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" 15 And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

So this commander of the army of the Lord is God in human form, is what's called a Christophany, an appearance of Christ before the birth of Christ.

And we know this is God there in front of him because Joshua worships him, and he isn't told to stop.

In the Bible, when people try to order other people, they tell them to stop¹. When people worship angels, they tell them to stop.² You don't regular people and you don't worship angels, you worship God.

And here Joshua worships, the man accepts the worship, and He says, "Take off your sandals, because this place is holy."

If you remember back in Exodus 3, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him to lead Israel, and the same thing happened. He told him to take off his sandals, because you're standing on holy ground.³

So Joshua was being commissioned just like Moses was, and he was face to face with the same unchanging, Holy God that Moses was face to face with in the bush.

And if God is Holy and transcendent and powerful and mighty and true, we don't ask Him to get on our side. We ask how we might get on His.

This is one of the most important aspects of what it means to live the Christian life.

So often in our day, if we even believe in a god at all, we have a god who is essentially dead - He has no real power or authority in our day to day lives. He has no authority to tell me who I am, He has no authority over my identity, no authority over my money, no

¹ Acts 14:14

² Revelation 22:9

³ Exodus 3:5

authority over my bedroom, over “my truth”, over whether I stay married or not, no authority over how I spend my time.

Our little God exists for me - and you see it so often even in our sermon emphasis: God can help me with my marriage, with my relationships, with my anxiety, with my ongoing self-help project.

He can be on my side, he can sign up to help with all the things I’m already pursuing. God exists mainly for me.

We don’t realize how pervasive this is, this is very much how we treat God even in church. Think of how we often evaluate a worship service: we often ask, “What did it do for me?”

Was I sufficiently greeted, was the music to my liking, did I get all the right feels? Even our worship is evaluated as if it exists for me.

Jesus is great for helping me with my feelings, and as long as He’s contributing to my self-actualization project and making me feel good, I like that Jesus.

And so the contemporary message of the church to the world is not “repent and worship Jesus,” the message is “try God.” He isn’t this transcendent, category shattering, sovereign over all God of the Bible. He’s more like an herbal remedy that your hippie friend recommends, and it couldn’t hurt to try to get some of him on your side.

So he’s great while he seems to help, he’s great when worship generates the right feelings. But soon enough, the feels go away. The singing feels hollow and fake very quickly. Because a God who exists as a cute help for all of my projects isn’t worth singing about.

To come to God is to come, as He introduces himself in verse 14, to the captain of the army of the Lord. And to bow and worship.

God doesn’t obey us, we obey Him. God doesn’t submit to what we call our truths, we submit to The Truth. We don’t get him on our side, we are called to get on His.

We aren't to develop our values, come to our positions on issues, discover "our truth", and then find a way to say God is on our side. You can find out-of-context bible verses to prove every case.

This is something for us to be aware of: there has been a shift in our culture. At one point, the ultimate frame of reference that everybody had was God and His absolute moral law. They weren't all Christians, but even most atheists 200 years ago agreed that there was some universal law, some universal right and wrong. We argued about what the law was, but we all had a sense that there was something higher we were appealing to, an ultimate truth to discover.

But now there has been a shift to a world where there is no frame of reference above each individual. James K.A. Smith says that in this world, "God is dead, but he's replaced by everybody else."⁴ My preferences, attitudes, and feelings are the ultimate moral guides.⁵

So I am, not who God says I am, but who I feel I am - my identity isn't given to me from God, it is determined by me (the new god in town.)
Something is wrong not because of a universal absolute, but only if it feels wrong to me. Truth is what I feel it to be.

This "God is dead" world actually isn't a world with no god, it is a world where everybody is their own God, everybody does what is right in their own eyes. I am whoever I feel that I am in this world, I don't have a higher frame I appeal to - I don't go to the scriptures to learn who I am, I decide who I am based on how I feel and everybody must agree with my assessment.

And if you feel that Christianity doesn't fit in this new system, you're right, it doesn't.

Because to encounter God, truly, causes a total realignment where we conform to His system. We can't demand that He conform to ours. That's what it means that He is our God - He is the ultimate.

So Joshua is realigned. And now it is time for the battle of Jericho. God is now going to

⁴ James K.A. Smith, [How \(Not\) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor](#)

⁵ These themes are unpacked in Carl Trueman's book, [The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self](#), a difficult read but a very good one.

do His work, God has now brought Joshua into alignment and gotten Joshua on the side of what He is going to do, and it would have to be a huge work of God because Jericho was tough:

Joshua 6:1 Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

That will be an important detail in a few minutes - for now just remember that the city was shut up, it was fortified. It was a walled city with closed gates, and every home inside the city likewise was locked down.

Joshua 6: 2 And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. 3 You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. 4 Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him." 6 So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." 7 And he said to the people, "Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD." 8 And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. 9 The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. 10 But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout." 11 So he caused the ark of the LORD to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp. 12 Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 13 And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. 14 And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

Not to get lost in the weeds here: but God's prescription for them to take this city doesn't make sense. This is a strong city, filled with "mighty men of valor" (verse 2). And God tells them to march around the city and blow trumpets. We're supposed to get the sense that this is futile for Israel.

They have walls and a trained army, Israel brings a tired depleted army out of the woods and marches around with trumpets. This is a David and Goliath story before David and Goliath were born. The Israelite army can't win this on their own.

And their strategy is not one of military brilliance. This really isn't much of a battle of Jericho.

But in the center of it all is the ark of the covenant, where the presence of God went with His people. So the people are weak, but God is with them. They have trumpets (which aren't great weapons), and they have to march around silently, without saying a word, just blaring trumpets. And they marched around the city blowing trumpets every day for six straight days. Not surprisingly, nothing happened.

There are some pseudo-science videos out there that say that try to explain how the Israelites got the walls of Jericho fall. This story even got a spot on Ancient Aliens on the history channel where they said that the Israelites were given a power source by aliens that they carried around in the ark of the covenant and it was enough power to amplify the trumpets to bring the walls down.⁶

But the point here is not that they had strong weapons, a great strategy, or technological know-how so they took out Jericho. The point is that in their weakness, God was strong, and God fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down.

God works through people who can't do it themselves. The insufficient. The weak. Those that know their only hope is God working, it certainly can't be in them.

God is gracious to His people, not waiting until they are strong enough to win on their own, but when they respond to Him by faith He does all the winning for them.

Joshua 6:15 On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. 16 And at the seventh time, when the priests

⁶ Seriously. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IY3OXWHEpHU>

had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city. 17 And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent. 18 But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. 19 But all silver and gold, and every vessel of bronze and iron, are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD." 20 So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they captured the city. 21 Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword.

So despite their meager strategy, because God was with them, when they blew the trumpets, the walls came tumbling down.

And they take the city, they are told not to take the wealth of it. And they're told the whole place is to be destroyed: and that includes all of the inhabitants, even young and old.

Now I wouldn't want to move too quickly past this and ignore some of the hard questions people ask about this text. This passage, and many others, is one of the reasons the Old Testament is so difficult for so many people. God here seems very different than the Jesus of the New Testament, He is ordering them to carry out this violent and bloody conquest.

How do we explain this?

1. The Bible reveals that God had been patient with the people of Canaan for 400 Years before executing just judgment.

God promised this land to Abraham 400 years before, but told him he couldn't take it yet because the Amorites, the peoples that lived in this area, weren't wicked enough to justify it yet:

Genesis 15:16 "And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

God is patient. God doesn't judge unjustly.

The Amorites were bad at the time of Abraham. And sin always grows if left unchecked. So now 400 years have passed and God says that now is the time for their judgment. They were at peak wicked. Leviticus and Deuteronomy describe rampant sexual sins and child sacrifice, to name just a couple of their prevailing sins (**Lev. 18:24-25; Deut. 12, 18:12**).

What made now the time for judgment, we can't say for sure. Perhaps God knew that their hearts were irreparably hard and that the city would never turn to righteousness. Maybe each generation was becoming more wicked and more powerful, and to prevent them from doing all of the damage they could do to the rest of the world, they had to be judged and taken out now. Maybe taking them out here prevented far more suffering than even this conquest created.

But either way, this was God's judgment, not just Israel's desire for land at play here. And we can trust that God is just. We second-guess that, we say it couldn't have been just, but God said that now after 400 years of waiting, it was time.

And Israel was not just marauding and taking out the city, they were being used by God as an imperfect tool for judgment on really wicked people.

Dale Ralph Davis writes, "The conquest is not a bunch of land-hungry marauders wiping out, at the behest of their vicious God, hundreds of innocent, God-fearing folks."⁷ (Davis, 52)

This is an army being sent in to wipe out a deeply wicked city, by the only one who can tell them to do so with any just authority.

The question when reading the Old Testament is not, "Is this nice?" The question of the Old Testament is, "Is this just?" God is always just, but it doesn't always look nice. Judgment is ugly.

Davis goes on: "...the conquest is not gross injustice but the highest (and most patient) justice."⁸

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, Joshua: No Falling Words, 52

⁸ Ibid.

2. Jericho could have avoided this fate

We won't turn there now, but in Deuteronomy 20:10-11, when God was telling the people they would take the promised land, he told them to offer peace to every city. And He said that "if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you" then they weren't to destroy the city.⁹

A city could open its gates and accept terms of peace and receive mercy. But Jericho did the opposite. (Remember king of Jericho didn't seek out the spies so he could bow and repent, but so he could destroy them. They are resisting God to the end.)

And we know God would have been merciful had they responded favorably to him because he does spare Rahab. She is just as evil as the rest of Jericho, but she responded to God by faith, she hid the spies, she aligned herself to God's purposes, and in verse 17 they were careful to spare her.

3. God does judge sin justly

This judgment of God on the sin of the people here is very severe.

We read this and think, "How could God order this? Surely their sin wasn't that bad."

But if we read from the perspective of those who trust and love the Lord, we read the story and say, "wow, sin really is so bad that it deserves this. Of course God isn't being unjust, and for it to be just to bring about this much destruction because of sin, then sin must really be that bad, God's holiness must be that offended."

And let's not make the mistake of thinking that this was Old Testament God who is somehow different than Jesus or different than God today. The Bible says again and again that God doesn't change:

James 1:17 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

⁹ Deuteronomy 20:10-11

One of the reasons God appeared as holy to Moses and told him to take off his shoes and then to Joshua and told him to take off his shoes is to show that despite all that changes, God remains the same.

Certainly, in Christ, we see more aspects of God's character. Christ is the most full, perfect revelation of God. But that never cancels out other things God has revealed about Himself, and it doesn't change any of the previous revelation.

We can't pit Old Testament God against New Testament God, as if Old Testament God was the God who carried out judgment on sin and New Testament God just wants a hug. He's the same God through and through.

God is always holy, and God always hates sin, and God judges sin.

Jesus Himself warned of the judgment of God. He didn't say that isn't a thing anymore now that we're in the New Testament.¹⁰

We're supposed to read about the fall of Jericho and think not, "Wow, they didn't deserve that," or "I'm glad God has changed," but "Wow, I deserve that. Because I'm a sinner too. This is how bad my sin is and how much it has offended the holiness of God who hasn't changed."

God's wrath is just. And it is driven by love. The wrath of God against sin isn't God being arbitrary and cruel, it isn't meaningless genocide. But it is a reflection of God's perfect justice and holiness, and his love for goodness.

Chesterton said, "The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him." God's love for what is good and right is so strong that he fights wickedness with fierce wrath.

Because I love my kids, I ha

¹⁰ Matt. 10:40-42, 12:48-49

And in the cross of Jesus, we see both the love of mercy of God and the severe judgment of God together. We read about the conquest of Canaan and wonder if it was deserved, if God is being just in his judgment.

But you can see that same severe judgment against sin just as clearly in the New Testament. Most clearly at the cross.

What Jesus endured on the cross is what our sin deserves. That is how holy God is and how much He loves good and hates sin.

But they weren't innocent

Sproul's "Holiness of God":

"The most violent expression of God's wrath and justice is seen in the Cross. If ever a person had room to complain for injustice, it was Jesus. He was the only innocent man ever to be punished by God. If we stagger at the wrath of God, let us stagger at the Cross. Here is where our astonishment should be focused."

4. God Offers Grace - Rahab - the most wicked in a wicked city is saved by grace.

We already saw this in verse 17/

21 Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. 22 But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." 23 So the

young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. 24 And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. 25 But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. 26 Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. "At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates." 27 So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

6. The Offer to Us

Don't shut up your heart

Sermon written by Kevin Maloney, with contributions by Abbey Sitterley and Cody Wilbanks. Prayer of Confession after this week's sermon was adapted from the prayer "The Righteous Judge" on page 142 of Streams of Mercy by Barbara and Iain Duguid.

Questions for Discussion in Small Groups:

- 1. What are some ways in which we assume God fits into our earthly categories?**
- 2. How have you understood God's wrath?**
- 3. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What do stories of God's judgment, like the Battle of Jericho, tell us about His character?**
- 4. How might our understanding of God's judgment impact our understanding of the cross and God's grace?**
- 5. How should our lives realign in light of these truths?**