

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God, our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On June 6th 1944, Dwight D. Eisenhower pulled off the most stunning and impressive invasion in **military history**. Over 100,000 Allied troops stormed the beaches of Normandy and by June 11 another 200,000 had crossed with over 100,000 tons of military equipment.

But as troops advanced into the hedgerows of France - the Germans formulated a counter offensive; using their infamous *Blitzkrieg* tactic. Now, the *blitzkrieg* or "*lightning war*" tactic was deceptive. **The Germans would rush columns of Panzer tanks** & troops swiftly into battle to overwhelm their enemy. The Allied forces would collapse at the sight of what appeared to be an invincible, unrelenting monster bearing down on them.

That was the Allied reaction to the blitzkrieg for most of the war. They could see only its power and their own vulnerability. So when this final blitzkrieg came, would it throw the Allies back to the beaches they had just won at such a great cost? How could they stop it?

The key involved trusting their leadership. **Eisenhower**, in the face of this massive counterattack was quoted saying: **"The present situation is to be regarded as opportunity for us and not disaster."** He had a plan to thwart this cunning blitzkrieg attempt...but it sounded crazy...**let the Nazis through**. If the Allies could bend and not break, they could funnel 50,000 German soldiers into a net — or as General Patton so delicately put it: *"the meat grinder."* It sounded crazy, but if the Allied troops heeded the Voice of their Commander - their victory was assured.

Our reading this week, in chapter 7, was filled with *WAR STORIES*. The Israelites were on the beaches of the Jordan River, ready to storm into the Promised Land. It'd been 40 years since they were last here. 40 years since they heard that bad report from the spies sent to scout the Promised Land. Joshua was one of those spies...but he had come back with a different report. He had trusted God's promise back then to guard & protect the Israelites in battle; to give them victory over their enormous enemies. Those enemies weren't any smaller 40 years later, but Joshua had aged. He was an old man. Would he still heed the voice of his Commander?

Evidently, God knew Joshua needed some encouragement. In our text for today, we heard YHWH, the Lord of armies, give Joshua a pep talk. 3 times in 4 verses we heard that memorable line: **Be strong & courageous**. But these aren't just empty words; these aren't just some niceties to boost Joshua's morale. No, God pairs up these words with the very keys to Joshua's success. In verse 7 He says: **Be careful to do according to all the law that Moses commanded you...that you may have good success. (1:7)** And in verse 9: **Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for YHWH your God is with you wherever you go. (1:9).** *The Keys: Listen to the WORD of God & Remember that God is with you, fighting for you.*

Which might sound simple enough. Until Joshua is standing outside the double walls of Jericho, towering at 40 & then 50 ft. high, and then hears God's battle plan. God says: **March around the city...for six days...and then on the 7th day do it 7 times, blow some trumpets and yell...and the walls will come 'a tumblin down (6:3-5).** *Are you kidding me?* I mean c'mon, God. There's got to be a more practical way. Surely there are some tactical battle manuals with strategies a bit more sensible *THAN THAT*. *Just walk around & shout?* It sounded crazy. Could it really be that simple?

For Joshua - the answer was: YES. He commands the people, they walk around just as God commanded them, and sure enough: THE WALLS FALL DOWN. Israel rushes in & defeats Jericho - one of the most

powerful & well-defended cities in the world at that time. And they would go on to claim victory over another 18 cities with their Kings & peoples, claiming the land God had promised so long ago. And each time - the key to their success was listening to the WORD OF GOD. When they knew it, and followed it - they had success. When they turned from it, or failed to listen to it...there were deadly consequences. Which is why we hear Joshua, at the end of his life, tell the people in one last speech that if they forget God's Word it would be a: **snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the Lord your God has given you (23:13)**. But if they listened to God: **And you shall possess their land, just as the Lord your God promised you (23:5)**.

Now as you read these stories, or ponder them today, you may have found yourself shuddering at the brutality of it. We often come to these texts with a modern ear, and can't read them without imagining something like the empiricism of Nazi Germany. But it's important to understand what's going on here. God isn't condoning violence in these sections. He's not suggesting that we (you & I) take up arms against a political party or a particular ethnic group or some unrighteous social movement and storm these "Jerichos" by force. As Jesus said in Matthew 5: **Do not resist the one who is evil. But turn the other cheek (5:39)** and **Love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you (5:44)**. So what's going on here?

What's happening in this section is God is delivering Divine Judgment on Human Evil at a specific moment in history. God is a God of love. But He can't BE THAT if He tolerates evil. If God lets evil persist in the world, that evil will inevitably destroy love & human flourishing - much like we saw in the events leading up to WWII. And so we believe in a God of Justice. Who will put an end to evil & the suffering it causes in the world. And that's exactly what He's doing here. The peoples that populated the Promised Land were morally bankrupt. They burned their sons & daughters in pagan worship (**Deut 12:29-31**) They practiced many lewd forms of sexual deviance (**Lev 18**). God had been patient to these people, giving them ample time to turn from their ways, but they hadn't changed, and so He did as He promised Abraham 600 years earlier: **"[The Israelites shall come back here... for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.] (Gen 15:16)**.

It was complete now, and God would wait no longer. And so He used Joshua & the Israelites as His arm of Justice, putting an end to that evil. And in the same moment, He established His people in the land that they might grow & flourish & spread His Name - so that all peoples of the world would be blessed. This was the reason for their battle.

And you and I are still locked in this battle today. The battle for the Promised Land. The geography's changed - we're not in the Middle East. Our enemies are not the Canaanites or the Amorites. But we're still locked in that age old battle between Good & Evil. And while we might think of specific people in this world that we see as agents of evil; people that become the targets of our thoughts OR conversations OR social media accounts...our real enemy is someone else entirely. Paul was clear in Ephesians: **We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against... the spiritual forces of evil (6:12)**. Our enemy is NOT our rival political party or the person pestering us at work or school. Our real enemy is the DEVIL.

And it's going to take more than just *blind optimism* to fight against him. It's not enough to simply **be strong & courageous**. We need to utilize those same keys to success that Joshua relied on! The presence of God & the power of His Word. Paul echoed this to us in that same Ephesians passage, instructing us to use: **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit (6:17-18)**. *We need to listen to the WORD of God*. Meditate on it. Let it soak into who we are, so that when the Devil comes 'round - we know how to respond to him. And we need to pray. Pray to Jesus. Unload to Him our fears & frustrations and let His Truth speak back to us.

Because the Devil will come around. **He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.** And he is the MASTER of deception. That is *His tactic too*. That title: Devil: is the word *Diabolos* in the Greek. It means “*slanderer*.” That’s the Devil’s tactic: *slander*. Making false & damaging statements about someone. He makes False Statements about who God is. Saying *That God isn’t there for you*. Trying to convince you *That God has abandoned you*. *That God could never, truly love you after all you’ve done*. Those are not true. Those are LIES! But how will you know? Unless you know the Truth. THE Truth. Jesus: the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

But maybe those are the easy ones. The lies about who God is. Maybe the more challenging ones, are the lies that the Devil tries to get us to believe about ourselves...Lies like: *Good things don’t happen to me, so why even try to be successful? Or If anyone actually knew me, they would reject me...*or maybe on the flip side: *I can say & do whatever I want; God forgives me so it doesn’t matter how I live in this world.*

The Devil has a way of getting inside our heads, plaguing us with disinformation about Who God is and Who We Are. But God has equipped us for the fight. With His Word that we get to hear & read & grow in. And with Prayer - that open channel of communication with THE DIVINE. With the One who created this whole world in His Wisdom. God’s Word & Prayer. *Could it really be that simple?* The short answer... is YES. But just because the strategy is simple, doesn’t mean the execution won’t be excruciating. The battle may be bitter and painful and persistent and at times, downright exhausting.

But take heart my friends. **Be strong & courageous.** For though the battle rages on -- the WAR is already over.

In 1944 - When the Germans resorted to their Blitzkrieg tactic once more - it was a last ditch effort. They had already, effectively LOST THE WAR. Many see the Battle of Stalingrad, which was already over a year earlier, as THE decisive battle of WWII. But the Nazis wanted to convince their enemies otherwise. They wanted to convince us, the Allies, that they were still the stronger ones, that they could still overturn what had already been accomplished.

The War with the Devil, that you & I are engaged in - **it’s ALREADY OVER**. For on that day, at Calvary, Jesus stormed the gates of Hell. He walked into The Devil’s domain. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, & was buried. He descended into Hell...and when He did - He knocked the Devil’s teeth out! Jesus declared VICTORY that day at the cross of Calvary. But you know how enemies respond when they know they’ve lost. *They dig even deeper. They blitzkrieg*. The Devil wants to convince you & me that Jesus’ work on the cross wasn’t definitive. That we aren’t forgiven. That God is NOT on our side.

But we know better. We know the Truth. The Devil has been defeated; Jesus has crushed his head! Jesus has risen again, He is ALIVE! And we are Alive in Christ. Victory is assured for you & for me, because of Jesus’ death & resurrection. *So may we see all of the Devil’s attacks & His perceived victories over us, not as disasters - but as opportunities - to draw near to our Savior. To draw near our King & Commander, Jesus. And to rest in His Word, His Presence, His TRUTH & HIS LIFE for us. In Jesus Name, Amen.*