

## July 5 – Joshua 5:13-6:20 – Stephen Lieberman

Continued exploration of Joshua...Children of Israel finally in Promised Land...Jericho remains in opposition to God...

There are three main movements – actions that we will explore - in this passage. Warren Wiersbe names these movements as 1) humble worship, 2) holy walk, and finally 3) heavenly warfare.

#1: The first is Humble worship. As Joshua approaches and begins to seriously consider, how exactly are we going to tackle Jericho, he looks up and sees a warrior. Joshua asks whether this warrior is for Israel, or for the enemy. This warrior responds in a rather cheeky way. “No.” This is not because the Lord was not for Israel, but rather, it is because Joshua’s primary concern (are you friend or foe) needed to be redirected – to who are you?

And who is this man – this “commander of the armies of the LORD”? Well, one option is that he is an angel – a messenger of God – perhaps the archangel Michael. The bowing before him does not necessarily indicate Joshua was worshipping – the ESV chooses that option – but it is alternatively translated “to pay homage”. It could be mere humility, and submission to the message coming to him from God.

However, there are others who believe this to be a pre-incarnate appearing of the Son. There are good reasons to think this is the case. Primarily because of his command. Joshua asks what the message is, and the commander answers, “take off your sandals, for you are on holy ground.” This ought to take us immediately back to Moses before the burning bush. Origen, the early church Father, asks – what makes this heathen land suddenly holy? The only satisfactory answer is that Joshua was in the presence of God himself.

I am going to jump out of the story for a moment. What makes our lives holy and acceptable to God? Is it not the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives? Has not God made himself present even within our own hearts? The point I wish to make is that Joshua is called to recognize the presence of God and to worship. This must be our default position in our relationship with God – to daily acknowledge that God is with us and that he deserves our humble worship. How much more careful in our speech and tone we would be with our loved ones, friends and acquaintances – if we acknowledged the presence of God always with us? How much easier it would be to keep every thought captive, if we became more aware that we are in the presence of God? In Christ, we know that God is pleased with his people and full of mercy and grace – but, it would do you a disservice to not give warning. Our lives ought to be consumed in humble worship as we live out our lives in the presence of our God.

#2 – Our starting place is humble worship. Joshua was not ready to walk the Holy walk he was called to lead the people on, until he had become aware of the presence of God, and humbly worshipped.

But, what is this Holy walk. If there is one thing the kids Bible stories and veggie tales has gotten right, it is that this walk made no sense. This was not a strategy that sometimes worked. It also, is not an instruction to be replicated. There is never another instance in which Jesus, or David, or Daniel went about their way, walking circles around the things that stood in opposition to God. This is not instructions – we are not called to walk seven days around our enemies' camps, or around the church building we would like to purchase, or anything like that.

Rather, the holy walk that the Israelites were called to, following the ark, this was a walk of obedience. It didn't make sense from a military perspective, yet following God is always the right way. And it as well speaks to us about our obedient walk of faith. What weird things do we do as followers of Jesus? What is countercultural? Or downright counterintuitive? If you cannot think of anything, then I encourage you to read the sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Take Jesus' instructions about love and prayer for example. I can see why we would love and pray for our friends and family, I can understand the benefit of attempting to make our cities and countries the best they can be. But, the call of Jesus goes beyond this, to loving and praying for our actual enemies, those who actually wish us harm, to those who bear us no good will. I can see no benefit to praying for and seeking the prosperity of our enemies – other than that it is in direct obedience to God and trusting that he loves them.

In following the Bible's teachings about how we are to treat those who mistreat us, how we are to bridle our tongues, how we are to relate to God the Father through Christ, how we are to be servants to all, these are our acts of obedient marching around the city. We don't do these things because it just makes sense (granted some things do make sense – such as treating people right when we realize that all are made in the image of God), but it goes beyond whether something makes perfect sense, to trusting in the Word of God and following the Holy Spirit's promptings.

#3 – The results, are the final action. We have talked of humble worship, and we have spoken of our holy walk of obedience. But, the results are in the hands of the commander of the armies of the Lord. When we have worshipped and adored (indicating of course that our lives are being transformed by the inward work of the Spirit), and we have walked in obedience after God (an act of spiritual warfare and obedience), then it is God who wins the battle. The commander of the armies of the Lord will do the work. In such a New Testament manner, the commander of the armies speaks of the victory already being won before the people even take their first step. It is an already and not yet paradigm.

Don't misunderstand, this is not a promise that what you perceive to be your "Jericho" (the thing that stands in the way of your success) will fall. No. Through the cross we see that God wins the victory through what appears like weakness. Perhaps in our obedience of Christ, our own lives will be forfeited – as happens in many nations around the globe today and every day. There is a trust – an exercise of our faith – that must take place where we trust that God is wiser than us, he is more just than us, more loving, and he is in charge of which walls must come down before he comes again in glory.

So, I leave you with this challenge. Will you structure your day, and your week in this manner? Choose to begin your day in worship, acknowledging God's holy presence in your life. By having church services on Sundays, we are liturgically practicing the way in which the days of the week ought to play out. In confession, in prayer, and in going out to love and serve the Lord. Each day is a battlefield for us to navigate. Our holy walk with God is riddled with temptations, with compromise, and with distractions. We need to be grounded in the Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to navigate our disagreements with the boss. Or our fried nerves when it comes to the bedtime routine, our phone calls and our doctor's appointments, these can all to be submitted to God as our act of worship and our walk of faith.

Finally, when we've submitted our lives in this manner, to worship and to walk with God, the results are left in his hands. We have no real perspective when it comes to God's timing. Will he give us the victory now or in the age to come? Will he call us to pray for "brother Tim" for a month, a year, a lifetime? Will we be called to turn the cheek just this once? Will it become easier or will we always feel the internal struggle when we share our faith with the lost? It is not for us to know when or if these particular walls will fall. But, we can trust that our God, the living God, is with us and the victory is already won in Christ. Let us pray.