

The Story – Joshua Fit The Battle

Last Sunday we talked about the giving of the law in the book of Exodus. This morning we not only set our clock forward an hour, but we've moved our story forward about forty years. The Israelites spent forty years wandering in the wilderness because of their grumbling and unbelief. They said they would rather die in the wilderness than be killed by the giants in the land of Canaan and God granted their wish. That whole generation that marched out of Egypt died in the wilderness and now Joshua is given the responsibility of leading their children, the next generation, into the promised land.

Most of us have probably heard the spiritual, "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho." We are going to look at that story, but first let's watch the Bible Project video for some historical background on the book of Joshua. (Video)

Moses is dead and God has appointed Joshua to be his successor. The Lord tells Joshua he will be with him just as he was with Moses. God says, **"Don't be afraid. Be careful to obey all the law I gave to Moses and you will be successful. Every where you set your foot I will give that land to you. Tell the people to get ready because you are going to lead them into the promised land."** In case the people aren't sure they can follow Joshua as their parents had followed Moses, God provides a similar miracle at the beginning of Joshua's leadership. Moses led the people out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea on dry ground. Joshua led the people into the promised land by crossing the Jordan river at flood stage and God parted the waters as he had at the Red Sea for Moses and the people crossed again on dry land. The bible says, **"That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses."** **Joshua 4:14**

Like Moses, Joshua sends spies to look over the land, especially the walled city of Jericho. The two spies are hidden in Jericho by a woman named Rahab who tells them, "I've heard of you and your God. I know your God is going to give you the city so I'll hide you but when you attack the city, spare me and my family." They agree and Rahab and her family are spared. She shows up later in the bible in a couple of interesting lists of people.

After 430 years in Egypt and 40 more years wandering in the wilderness, the time has finally come to return home to their promised land. **"Joshua told the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.'"** **Joshua 3:5** They cross the Jordan with the priests and Levites carrying the ark of the covenant, leading the way.

As the priests step into the river the water stops flowing and the people cross on dry ground as the priests stand in the middle of the riverbed. They cross into the promised land and prepare to drive out the people who are living there at that time. I know it sounds unfair, to drive these people out, but they were cruel and wicked people, practicing all kinds of sin and immorality, including child sacrifice. God was judging these people for their sins in addition to securing the land he had promised to give to Abraham and his descendants.

Among the first things done after they crossed the Jordan river, Joshua had all of the men born during the forty years in the wilderness circumcised. They had not done this during the wilderness wanderings. Remember this was a physical sign of the covenant God made with them. It was a sign of being set apart and belonging to God. Before they could fight their enemies, they needed to make sure they were right with God. In addition, after forty years of manna, this bread that fell from heaven, the manna stopped and they ate some of the produce of the land. They also celebrated the Passover, remembering the faithfulness of God in delivering them from Egypt.

The first obstacle before them is the walled city of Jericho. Joshua is doing a little reconnaissance when he encounters a heavenly warrior who identifies himself as the commander of the army of the Lord. He gives Joshua the strangest battle plan. Instead of attacking the city or scaling the walls, have the priests and Levites march around the city carrying the ark of the covenant. Have seven priests with trumpets (shofars) march in front of the ark of the covenant blowing the horns and have an armed guard walking before and after the priests and the ark. Do this once around the city for six days. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets and on the seventh time, have the priests sound a long blast. When you hear that long blast, have the people shout a loud shout and the walls will collapse and you can go straight in and take the city. That's what happened. Joshua and the Israelites capture and burn the city and their fame and the fear of God spread throughout the land. That's how Joshua fit the battle of Jericho. Now let me make a couple of observations.

Prepare for battle. The book of Joshua is a story of conquest and battle. Other than the historical significance, what value is the book and the story to us? We aren't in physical combat but there are lessons for us in Joshua because we are engaged in a spiritual battle. The bible says **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the authorities, against the**

powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”
Ephesians 6:12. We are in a battle and church, we haven't seen anything yet!

God told Joshua and the people he was giving them the land he promised them, but that didn't mean there wouldn't be battles to fight or losses experienced. He was giving them the land, but they would have to be prepared to do battle and obey his commands. That's why he tells Joshua in the first chapter, **“Be strong and courageous...Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it...Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”** **Joshua 1:6-9** We have to be prepared for spiritual warfare. Get ready because the intensity of the battle is about to be turned up a notch. These folks had spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness with an occasional skirmish. They had their challenges, but they hadn't faced anything like they were about to face. There were great victories ahead, but there were serious challenges as well. I think the same is true for the church in America. The soul of America is at stake. What do we do?

Don't be afraid, instead, trust and obey. I hate when God says “don't be afraid” because that means there is something frightening ahead of me. “Don't be discouraged” means there are things out there that might be discouraging. What can we do? Be strong and courageous and depend on the Lord. That's what he told Joshua. He said to meditate on God's word and be careful to do everything he said to do. Don't let God's word depart from your mouth means, read it and speak it and live it. We aren't going to survive spiritually if we don't know what God's word says. Your family won't survive. Our church won't survive if we don't know and understand and live by God's word. We are in a life and death battle for our souls! What can we do? Trust God, obey him and then, regardless of what comes, regardless of how fierce the battle, regardless of how high the walls of the city, we won't have to be afraid. God will be with us and he will give us the victory. Trust and obey. It's just that simple. Are you willing to trust God and obey him and his word?

As I was studying and praying about this message, something began to stir in my spirit. Joshua told the people to consecrate themselves to the Lord, to get ready because “tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things.” I thought back to the summer of 1985. I preached a message about Joshua, about consecrating yourself, preparing yourself because God was getting ready to do amazing things and take us somewhere we had never gone before. God was stirring our

church at that time and he prepared us for changes that came and over the past thirty years we have seen some wonderful things happen. Something began to stir in my heart and spirit that once again, we are on the verge of something. Change is coming. I think it is fair to say there are difficult days ahead for our nation. There are reasons for God to say to us what he was saying to Joshua, “don’t be afraid, don’t be discouraged, instead, trust God and obey his word.”

When I preached about Joshua in 1985, I was a thirty year old pastor saying to my generation that we needed to get ready, that obviously change had come to Carbondale because to my knowledge I was the youngest pastor we had ever had. Change had come. I was viewing things from the perspective of Joshua. Thirty-one years later and I’m more in the place of Moses than Joshua. I’m not dead yet, but I’m saying this to the next generation of leadership, to the next Joshua generation – you need to get ready. You need to consecrate yourselves and get ready to lead.

I mentioned at the business meeting a few weeks ago in reference to the building plans that you twenty and thirty and forty year olds, you need to decide this is your church and you need to put down deep roots here. It’s time for you to invest your money and your resources and your life here. I know you are already, but I’m just saying we need you and we want you to cast your vision and your future here because this is your church, this is where God wants you to be. Get ready. There is a shaking coming to America and to our world and it will shake the church world as well. You are going to need a church family that will stand with you as you stand for Christ and his truth. This church family is going to need you and your leadership as never before. The spiritual skirmishes we’ve experienced in the past won’t compare to the battles ahead but don’t be afraid and don’t be discouraged. Trust God. Get ready. Consecrate yourself. Commit yourself and your family to God and live according to his word. God is raising up new leaders and preparing for new directions. There will be a new vision cast in the future. Trust God and don’t be afraid to follow where God leads. I’m not planning on dying or going anywhere soon, but God is going to stir his church and we are going to need more leaders like Joshua to help lead this church and help us stay true to our calling and mission.

Joshua told the people as they prepared to cross the Jordan, **“When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests who are Levites carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before.”** Joshua 3:3-4

We've never been this way before, we've never seen it like this before, we've never experienced things like this before, so the only thing I know to do is to keep following the presence of God. Follow the ark of the covenant Joshua said. Why? The commandments God gave to Moses were inside the ark of the covenant. Keep following God's word. The ark represented his presence. Keep following the presence of God. The ark represented God's mercy. Keep following after his mercy. The fact that the ark of the covenant was before them let them know the same God that led Moses and led their fathers was leading them. The same God that led the pastors and saints of Carbondale over the past 80 years, He will lead the next generation if you will keep on following him and stay true to his word.

Circumcision, bare feet and sounding trumpets. Joshua is trying to figure out how he and God and the people are going to conquer the Canaanites, beginning with Jericho. Joshua 5 tells us when word spread that the Jordan River at flood stage had parted and the Israelites had crossed on dry ground, the Amorites and the Canaanites' hearts melted and "they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites." It was a perfect time to march against Jericho. But what does God order Joshua to do? Circumcise the men. The worst military strategy ever!

Instead of striking while the iron is hot, so to speak, they stop at Gilgal to circumcise all the Israelite men and celebrate Passover. Circumcision for the Jews was the mark of the covenant of God. It was to the Jews what baptism is to us as Christians, it is a sign of being in right relationship with God. It made no sense to weaken the fighting men and lose the opportunity to strike, but more important than military strategy was the importance of being in right relationship with God. Do you hear what I'm saying? It's more important to be right with God than it is to gain military advantage or win elections or anything else. It made no sense to waste time with circumcision and celebrating Passover, but that's what God said to do. Make sure these men were, in that sense, right with God. Make sure they remembered the faithfulness of God and his deliverance before they go into battle to possess the land. God's priorities are not our priorities sometimes. Keep that in mind!

Now look at this...when Joshua meets the commander of the Lord's army, he asks him **"What message does my Lord have for his servant?"** Joshua is wanting strategy. "If you've come from heaven, what does God want me to do to get past the walls of Jericho?" And what was the response? **"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy. And Joshua did so."** Joshua 5:15

Instead of giving Joshua military advice and strategy he tells him to take off his sandals and recognize the place where he is standing is holy. Take off your sandals and worship. Take your eyes off of the Canaanites and the walls of Jericho and put your eyes on your God. Change your perspective by worshiping God. You want to know how to be victorious? It's not by out-scheming your enemy, it's by recognizing God's presence, by worshiping and honoring him!

Taking time to circumcise the men and celebrate Passover, taking time to worship and bow before the Lord, none of this makes sense by the world's standards. None of this fits with military strategy and it only gets worse because here's the plan for taking Jericho. Assemble the army, but instead of attacking, have them watch the Levites carry the ark of the covenant around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days. Have seven priests walk in front of the ark blowing the shofar. Then on the seventh day, have this same crew march seven times, then give a long blast and then have all the people shout because at that moment the Lord will give you the city.

That's crazy isn't it? Nothing about this makes sense, and that's because we try to make it fit our plans, our strategy, our schemes. There was nothing about this that showed military strength. A bunch of guys blowing shofars while some other guys carry a gold box. Sometimes God talks crazy, that's all you can say. Sometimes faith and trust leads us to do some crazy things. All the time it reminds us God's ways are above our ways. God's plans and thoughts are above and beyond our plans and thoughts. We have to decide if we are on the Lord's side then we are going to trust and obey regardless of how crazy his plan looks or sounds.

What's God saying to you? Where is he asking you to trust Him when it doesn't seem to make much sense? You want to act and rush in to do something and God seems to be calling you to circumcision and Passover, he is calling you to take off your sandals and worship and acknowledge his presence. He is telling you to stop and wait on his timing when you want to attack the city. He is telling you to trust him even if it makes you look foolish. He is preparing you for leadership, for the next thing and he is asking you to trust his timing and his ways. Joshua was being prepared as he walked through the wilderness assisting Moses. He could have tried to hurry Moses out of the way, but he trusted God's timing. What is God saying to you? What is he calling you to? You've never been this way before so you better make sure you can see him. Make sure you are following his presence like Israel followed the ark. What is he calling you to surrender, to consecrate to him? God wants to do amazing things but he requires your surrender. What is God saying to you?

