

Impossible Victory

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[0 : 00] Now I'd like this evening to look back at the account that we read together from Joshua, the book of Joshua about the fall of Jericho.

Probably a well-known story to us, certainly a well-known story in the children's story Bibles. And with God's help and I hope with your prayers over this weekend, it is certainly my intention to encourage you, to bring God's encouragement to you and to focus on the greatness of our God and the encouragement that trusting in him brings to us.

You're facing new challenges as a congregation who have joined together. You've had a hard and difficult year and I simply want to focus on Jesus and on his greatness and on his goodness.

And I want to do that through tonight, through the Old Testament and through maybe an unusual passage to look at on the Friday evening of a communion weekend.

But I think in our relationship with God in our lives, we sometimes begin that on a day-to-day basis in our dialogue with God with the wrong question and from the wrong vantage point.

[1 : 34] And the Bible always helps us to recalibrate our thinking and recalibrate our perspective, to challenge us and to expose us and in many ways to turn our thinking upside down and to recognize who God is and our relationship to him.

And it's interesting in Joshua chapter 5, the end of the section that we read from that chapter, that when Joshua meets the commander of the Lord's army, he asks the question, Are you on my side? Are you on our side? Are you for us or are you for other people? And Joshua's whole standpoint there was that he was at the center.

He was important. And he needed to find out if, as it turns out, this revelation of God that comes to him is on his side.

And that's often, I think, sometimes the question we ask of God is, in our thinking, we say, Is God with me? Is God with us? Or is he with others?

[2 : 49] Is he an enemy? Is he on my team? Is he going to stand beside me? Or am I going to have to turn my back on him and reject him? And very often that we find is the thinking of society and those who maybe don't have faith.

It's a very me-centric question. They're asking, Is God going to be sufficient for me? Is he going to agree with what I understand him to be like? Rather than coming at it from a different angle.

Because the claim of the Bible throughout the claim of all the revelation of God is to exclusive truth. And to a revelation of this world in which we live has been a God-centered world.

Not a me-centered world. Now that may be sounding a very obvious thing to say. But in our lives we quite often live with a me-centered attitude. Rather than a God-centered attitude.

And in our challenges and in our questions of God. It is quite often because we are coming from a me-centered attitude. Rather than a God-centered one.

[3 : 56] And here is the God of the universe. He is the author of creation. Of all goodness. Of all love. Of all morality. And of all justice.

The God who has always existed. As a being. Has no start. No finish. No edge. No limitation. Our maker.

To whom we are accountable. And the Bible always challenges us to see him for who he is. Rather than shrink him down to someone that we manage.

And that we control. But he communicates with us. So that the question is changed. Not are you with me God.

But rather God says. As it were in verse 14. He said no. I am the commander of the Lord. The army of the Lord. Now I have come.

[4 : 55] And the implicit. Statement he makes there is rather. Are you with me? And that's a very important question. And this Old Testament.

Theophany. This revelation of God. Because we know. That he then. Joshua goes on. To recognize who he is. And worships him. Take off the sandals from your feet.

For the place you are standing is holy. He reveals himself to Joshua as God here. And that's an awesome revelation. And it changes everything for Joshua.

And it leads him. To a place of worship. Worship. And that really is the whole point of the Bible. And of God's communication with us. To bring us to that place. Where we do what we cannot do by nature.

Which is to worship the living God. Because sin has disordered our lives to such a degree. That we will worship anything and everything.

[5 : 55] Except the living God. That Jesus Christ came to deal with our disordered lives. And our disordered worship. And our spiritual death.

Death. That leaves us under his just and fair judgment. And leaves us spiritually recoiling from worship.

Misunderstanding the concept of sin. And finding different reasons for the chaos of this world. So all of these stories in the Old Testament.

Point us towards God. And point us towards his redemption. Looking forward to that. As it's revealed in Jesus Christ. There's great promise in them.

And there's great stories of rescue. And they all have this great redemptive theme. Now a story like this. The story of Jericho.

[6 : 56] Is quite a difficult story in many ways. But it teaches us some very important. Characteristics and truths. About the living God.

That I want to look at. For a brief time. This evening. It's a difficult account. It's a difficult account for 21st century people. Can you imagine reading this.

In a secular audience. And the cries of injustice. And brutality. And murder.

That might come from the floor. But we can never. We can never disentangle these stories. From God's central theme. Of what he is telling us.

And we can't isolate them. And we can't argue them away. We've got to face these stories. Absolutely. Head on. And recognise the. Significant.

[7 : 52] Important. And merciful truth. That they speak of. Because. This passage speaks of. I'm sure many more things. But at least two things. Speaks of God's destruction.

And also God's victory. And. We'll look at that. And then I hope. Apply it briefly. To our own understanding of God. As we think of him. And as we remember him.

In redemption. Over. These few days. So verse 21. The last verse we read. Is a very brutal verse. Then they devoted all the city.

To destruction. Both men and women. Young and old. Sheep and oxen. And donkeys. With the edge of the sword. A brutal reality.

But it wasn't random. And it wasn't indiscriminate. It wasn't ethnic cleansing. Or racially based. God.

[8 : 52] Was very deliberately. Doing. What he said. He would do. To this people. His judgment. Was stayed. From many other nations.

Of the world. At this time. It was. A limited judgment. And the judgment. He meted out here. He also meted out. At different times. On his own people.

The people of God. So it was a very. Deliberate. Judgment. That is poured out here. It's a spiritual judgment. That he. Meets.

And brings. And brings. Upon this. Specific. People. They had been engaged. In evil. Of the most. Vile form. As a people.

They were. Incredibly. Brutal. And. A wicked nation. Who. Apart from other things. Would. Offer up. Their own children. For.

[9 : 47] Sacrifice. To their gods. It wasn't. A random. Act of judgment. Nor was it. A capricious. Act of judgment. In Genesis. 15. And verse 16.

God. Promises. Patiently. That he would deal with this. Amorite nation. And. He. Gave them. 400 years. And he said.

Their wickedness. Would not be filled. Until. That time. Was up. He gave them time. To know him. Time. To turn. From. Their sins.

They knew about. Israel. They knew about. The redemption. That Israel had. Received from God. Taking them out of Egypt. Into the promised land. We know that.

Because. Rahab. Speaks about that. Earlier on. In this. Account. That we didn't read. Where she said. Our people. Know about. What you. The living God. Has done. And they know about.

[10:42] The redemption. And the escape. And the rescue. That they've received. But they were unwilling. To come under. The lordship. Of the living God. They would rather. Tremble behind.

These great walls. And take their chances. On the physical. Human. Power. That they had. Over. The people of Israel. Rather than trust.

In the living God. It was an irrational. Rejection. And isn't that so true. For people. That they. Irrationally. Reject the living God. They would rather.

Be independent. And be self. Contained. Rather than trust. In the living God. And Jericho. Was. Was. I don't know.

How you could compare it. With a modern. City. State. But. It was. It was the pinnacle. Of. Human.

[11:38] Power. It was. An amazing. City. It was like. The titanic. Of cities. It had impregnable. Walls. Archaeology. Makes that clear.

As. They look back. And see. The amazing. Technology. And. Architecture. That was used. To make it. An impregnable. City. It was the. Pinnacle.

Of. Human. Power. And. In many ways. Rebellion. Against. The living God. It was. Impregnable. People. And yet. God. As we'll go on to see.

Brings destruction. On this most rebellious people. And city. And we recognize. Even within. The Old Testament. Revelation.

That. The judgment. On Jericho. Was part. Of a wider. Perspective. That God. Was working. Through the nations. He was warning them. That he was the living God.

[12:36] Who would destroy. Sin. And evil. He was warning. His own people. Not to allow evil. To flourish. They could not. Dovetail. With evil. They couldn't. Compromise.

With evil. They couldn't. Make allegiance. With evil. They had to. Recognize. Its destruction. Because. We see.

Again and again. In the history. Of the Old Testament. The potential. For catastrophic. Liaisons. Between God's people. And those who didn't. Worship the living God.

Constantly falling. Into idolatry. Constantly falling. Into rejection. Of the living God. And coldness. And spiritual. Declension. It was also.

A message. That God. Was bringing. Gifting. This promised land. To the redeemed. Retaking it. From the powers. Of darkness. And giving it.

[13:32] To God's. Redeemed. People. The land. Flowing. With milk. And honey. So it's a passage. Which speaks. Of God's destruction. But it's also. A passage. That speaks.

Of God's. Victory. God's. Remarkable. Victory. And we mustn't. Cast that. Aside lightly.

Verse 2. Before. Anything. Had happened. With the city. The Lord. Said. To Joshua. See. I have given. Jericho. Into your hand.

With its king. And its mighty. Men. Of valor. Before anything. Had happened. God. Had promised. That the victory. Was his.

Israel. Were really. Simply. Agents. Through whom. God. Worked. To bring this victory. To pass. It was clearly. An act of God. It wasn't.

[14:26] To do. With the military. Strategic. Insights. Of the Israelites. It was simply. Through obeying. The unusual. Commands. That God. Gave to them.

There were impossible. Odds. This was an impregnable. Fortress. Israel. Didn't have. A mighty army. But they did have. The commander.

Of the Lord's army. And we see. The Lord. Working victory. In this. Particular account. It was. A strategic. Victory. Jericho.

Jericho. Was the gateway city. To the promised land. And the people of Israel. The people of God. Were to. Follow. Implicitly.

The commands. That God gave. They weren't. Great militaristic commands. Certainly not. In human terms. The fighting men. Really.

[15:22] Remained silent. They were. At the beginning. Of the procession. And at the end. Of the procession. Guarding. Who were they guarding? They were guarding the priests.

And the Ark. Of the Covenant. So. The fighting men. Are not prominent here. Rather. The priest. Is prominent. And the Ark. Of the Covenant. Which is the symbol of God's presence. Among his people. Is mentioned. Eight times. In this account. It's very prominent. As it went round. The city. Each day. Slowly.

Once. Slowly. Again. Throughout that week. And throughout that week. The trumpet sounded. And the trumpets.

Were sounded. In worship. In Israel. And in times of war. It kind of fuses together. In this moment. Where God is. At the center. Of what is happening.

[16:18] And they are facing. Their enemies. Seven times. They go round. The number. As we know. Perfection. Biblically. And then. Seven times. On the seventh day.

They go round. The day of rest. The day. When God rested. From his labors. And which they knew. Was a day. Of rest. And almost.

Symbolic. Of the fact. That on this. Great. Last day. They were trusting. In God. Even more. And then. One shout. One shout. Of all the people.

And the impregnable. Double lined walls. Miraculously. Collapse. And that again. I believe. Though I'm no archaeologist.

Is. Has been made clear. In archaeological finds. That there was an. Unusual destruction. Of these great. Walls. And it was to be a complete. Absolute.

[17:15] And total. Total. Victory. And in God's victory. He reveals his mercy. To Rahab.

The prostitute. Who had. Put her trust. And her hope. In the living God. If you look back. At chapter 3. You'll see.

What she says. To the spies. She knows. And she recognizes. Who the Lord is. And she knows. That he alone. Can be her savior. And she's willing.

To trust in him. With her family. Before. Associating. And remaining. With her own people. And she's rescued.

Because of her faith. And her trust. And she becomes. The mother of Boaz. Who becomes. Part of the genealogy. Of Jesus.

[18:08] Jesus. And the interesting reality. Even in this story. And in many similar stories. In the Old Testament. Is that we have the thread. From Genesis 3. Which speaks about.

The seed of the woman. Which would come. To crush the head. Of the serpent. And the Old Testament. Is not a story of. Or a history of the whole world.

It's in many ways. A history of God's people. And particularly. Of the protection. Of this line. Of this seed. You'll find. In the genealogy. Of Jesus and Matthew.

That most of the Old Testament. Stories are represented. In the line. Of Jesus. Because Jesus. God was protecting. That line.

From the evil one. Who would seek. To destroy the seed. Before the seed. Came. And there's pictures of that. In Revelation. Also. And also.

[19:04] Throughout these Old Testament. Stories. You see God. Being counterintuitive. In who is chosen. And who receives the gospel. And who receives faith.

It was. Revealed in such a way. That it was nothing to do with merit. It was nothing to do with popularity. It was nothing to do with gifting. It was nothing to do with morality.

It was to do with trust. Rahab the prostitute. Ruth the Moabitess. Moses the trembling one. Abraham the liar. And all of the characters. With all their faults. Are revealed as those who trusted. In the living God. For salvation.

And that theme runs. Throughout. Scripture also. So the story of Jericho. May seem very distant from us. This evening. May seem very distant.

[20:00] From your experience. And from your life. And from your knowledge. And from your culture. And from all of ours. But the question. That every story. In the scripture. Must.

Encourage us to ask. Is how well. Do we know God. And how. Clearly. Is our trust. Placed in him. Now we recognize.

That the God. That is revealed here. Is progressively revealed. More clearly. Throughout scripture. And we have the. The great advantage. Of looking back. To all that has been revealed.

About the living God. Particularly. In the person. Of Jesus Christ. But this is a piece of the whole. And what do we learn. This evening. What is it that we can take away.

From a passage. From a story like this. I'm sure that again. There's many. Many things. Can I just say one or two. As we consider it. And apply it.

[20 : 55] To our own lives. And the first is very important. Is that justice. On God's terms. Is inescapable. Absolutely inescapable.

That justice will be delivered. By the living God. In his own time. And in his own place. God is the standard. God is the measuring line.

God is the person. And we all. Fall short. Of his glory. Death. Is his judgment.

On sin. And we all. Are those. Who die. And how can we be sure. That that's the case. What is it that we can use. And what is it that we recognize.

That this is the case. Is the person of Christ. Christ. And his incarnation. Is hugely significant. But his incarnation.

[21 : 53] Is not the end of the story. The fact that he became one of us. Is not. What is ultimately significant. It is the fact that he came. As one of us. In order.

To die. In order to remit. The sentence. That we could not pay. God faced. Death. In the person of Jesus Christ.

And he. Took on himself. His own. Just judgment. He recognized. That we can't meet. His standard. He recognized. That. You and I. As believers. Before we were believers. Could never. Make our way to him.

And make ourselves right with him. And we could never satisfy. His justice. Yes. And he. He recognized. That the only answer. Was that he himself.

[22 : 48] The living God. Would pay the price. Would die in our place. Which is. The very focus. The very center. Of the Lord's Supper. That we. Will celebrate. God willing. On Sunday.

And. In that place. We recognize. God the father. Was silent. And God the son. Cries out. Why. Am I forsaken. Because of the uniqueness. Of the provision. That was being made. God's love. Drove him.

To the only answer. That enables us. To sit here this evening. And worship. Which is that he. Would be our substitute. That he takes. The. Inescapable reality.

Of judgment. Upon himself. And the reality. Is if we. Do not have. Jesus Christ. As the one. Who is in our place. We inescapably.

[23 : 45] Face that judgment. Ourselves. We recognize. That every. Single person. Is accountable. To the living God. So that's why. Knowing God.

Matters. That's why. It's so significant. That's why. It's not just. Something that is. Cultural. Or something. That's ritualistic. Or something.

That happens to be. What we believe. Because of where. We were brought up. It is the truth. Of the universe. In which we live. And it is the truth.

That makes it. So crucial. That we recognize. How important. God is. Particularly. In salvation. And grace.

You rose. From the dead. Victorious. Over. Death. And returns. In judgment. And Jericho.

[24 : 42] Is that kind of. Intruding. Snapshot. Into the reality. Of a God. Who will return. In judgment. And the only place. Of safety. And the only place.

Of hope. Is in the shadow. Of Calvary. And trusting. The living God. God. So his. Justice. Is inescapable. His mercy.

Is incomparable. And that's what we. Rejoice in. And that's what I focus. And point to. This evening. What he asks us to do.

Is to trust in his love. To know his rescue. And his redemption. And the acceptance. That he offers. For any. Who will trust in him.

And that is a humbling reality. For us. And it changes. Our perspective. And it changes. The questions. That we ask of God. It's not.

[25 : 35] About. How good. We think we are. It's not. About. How moral. We can be. He turns. All of that. On its head. As we see. From the heroes.

Of faith. And simply. As. You look at. Hebrews 11. And look at. The list of people there. And look at. The lives. That God. Allows. To be revealed.

About them. In scripture. These are people. Who need rescued. And the great reality. For us. As a community. Of believers. Is we are a community. Of believers.

Who have been rescued. And we accept. His mercy. And his grace. Before you were even born. Before we were even. Thought of. He had this great love. And care. And desire. For our souls. So that we might know. Forgiveness. And life. And presence. With him. It really is.

[26 : 34] A great salvation. So we see that mercy. Is incomparable. We also recognize. That obedience. Is inescapable.

The obedience of faith. Is inescapable. In Hebrews chapter 11. And the roll call of faith. And it speaks about. The people of Jericho. It says. It says. That their faith. Was honored. Through their obedience. To what the Lord has said. And. That reality. Is. Ongoing. And crucial for us. In our Christian lives.

We obey. Not in order. To be accepted. We are accepted. Therefore. We obey. Because we've been recipients.

Of his love. And of his grace. And we've been empowered. By the Holy Spirit. To have a heart. Of obedience. To the living God.

[27 : 31] And when we have received. His rescue. And we received his grace. We are to. Seek. An unqualified life. Of obedience. Not just on a Sunday.

Not just a couple of hours a week. Now and again. But in all of our life. We are to live a life. Of grace. And obedience. To all he commands.

However counterintuitive. It seems for us. To be forgiving. To be. Revealing the fruit of the spirit. In a world. Which doesn't accept. And understand. The standards of the living God.

It will all. Often require patience. Waiting. Silence. Opposition. Loss. And grief. But that is the path. That you are asked. And I am asked. To walk. For Jesus Christ. Because faith. And obedience. Are inseparable.

[28 : 35] As we understand. The teaching. And the example of Jesus. And lastly. We can take. I think from this passage.

That victory in him. Is unassailable. Unassailable. And I hope. That that is. An encouragement. For us. In our Christian lives.

We often doubt that. I think particularly. Maybe in our 21st century. Secular. Un-Christian. Society. In which we live. The Lord said. To Joshua. See. I have given Jericho. Into your hand. Before. Anything. Before a step. Was taken.

The victory. Was assured. And the promise. Of God. Is sure. Forgiveness. And life. In him. Is guaranteed. Because the resurrection.

[29 : 30] Has occurred. And God. The father. Has pleased. With. The work. Of his son. Satan. And sin. Has been defeated. And will be destroyed.

And we need to keep. That perspective. In our lives. Now I know that. His ways are not our ways. And sometimes. It doesn't seem like that. That's why we need to live by faith. And that's why we need to trust him.

We trust him. Because he is worth trusting. We trust him. Because he promises. We trust him. Because of what has already happened. And we recognize. That there is a great hope.

And a great future for us. In Christ. That perspective is. Crucially important. In our Christian lives. Because we recognize. That we live.

In a spiritual war. Ephesians 6. Makes that absolutely clear. We are in a battle. We have an enemy of our souls. The minute you professed faith.

[30 : 29] The first time you came to the Lord's table. The minute your eyes were opened to grace. And you followed Jesus Christ. Satan. Was interested in you. And in your life. In a way that he never was before.

And there is a battle. As Christians. We know that. We recognize that. And unbelief around us. Does seem impregnable. Just like the walls of Jericho.

People. But it is. Hugely important. To remember. That it is not a battle. Between equals. It is a battle.

Where the victory is already won. And if we stay. In Jesus. And if we trust in Jesus. And if we cry out. To Jesus Christ. The victory is ours. The Christian.

And the church. And you are coming to. An exciting. New period. In your life. As a church. You will. And you can. Move forward. In hope.

[31 : 26] And in what Jesus has done. It is. We can't stand still. And we have the gate. The great promise. That the gates of hell. Will not prevail. Against the kingdom.

Now we have often taken that. Well I think. Maybe. I certainly have sometimes. In the past. Taken that. As a defensive thing. That like. Satan is attacking the church.

And somehow the church. Is able to overcome. But that is the wrong perspective. Because you never. Have an image. Or a picture. Of gates. Being.

An attacking. Image. It is always a defensive image. It is the. The gates of the city. That were. To be impregnable. Were to keep the enemy out. And so the picture is not of the.

Satan attacking the church. It is of Christ. Christ. Crushing Satan. And moving forward. And the will. And the power. And the malevolence of Satan.

[32 : 24] And not being able to prevail. Against the kingdom. And against the progress. Of God. And his people. It is the absolute opposite. Of what we sometimes think. Hell is cowering.

Before the power of Jesus Christ. Because hell is defeated. By what Christ achieved. And the cross. And the gospel. Will crush. And Christ.

Will return. And he will wipe away. Every single tear. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. Evil. And that matters in your life and mine. When we are faced with evil.

And questions. And darkness. And doubt. And experiences we never thought we would ever have. And ones we don't understand. In Christ.

Even these darkest of events. Can be turned on its head. As we plead. And cry out to the living God. And trust him. These are used.

[33 : 21] By God. For our good. We know that. And we recognize that. So often. And that is our hope. In darkness. It's not necessarily that we understand it.

It's not that we have answers. But rather. As we commit our lives. And commit our experiences to the living God. We see him using. Even what Satan intends.

You know that great. That great verse. At the end of the story of. Joseph. And he speaks to his brothers. What you intended for evil. God used for good.

And that. Remarkable principle. Still. Is significant and important. In your life and in mine today. What Satan. And those who oppose the gospel.

Intend for their destruction. God takes. And even brings victory from that. I hope and pray. I hope and pray. That we can see that more and more. In the lives that we live. Which are often battle strewn.

[34 : 21] And full of grief. And difficulty. And that we can be encouraged. And victorious. And full of faith. And full of faith. Asking God to help us see more clearly.

And asking to understand. His ways. And asking that great question. Not God. Are you on my side? Are you working for me? Rather Lord.

Am I following you? Am I doing your will? And do I recognize. The kingdom principles. By which. I must live. And I hope that the story.

Of. Jericho. And Joshua. Enables us to see that. A little bit. More clearly. What. Are the questions. That you are asking God.

I. Hope and pray. That they are the right ones. Because as we see God. The only response. As it was with Joshua. Is worship.

[35 : 21] Let's bow our heads. And pray.