

The God Who Fights for His People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 October 2016

Preacher: Adam Ch'ng

[0 : 00] Well, friends, why don't we pray? Almighty God, as we look at your word this evening, we pray that you give us eyes to see, ears to hear, minds to understand and hearts to receive your word written for us.

And these things we pray in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, friends, I want you to think back to 2006. What were you doing? Where were you studying or working? How was God acting in your life? I was in year 12 at the time. I was studying for my VCE, but spending actually most of my time leading my church's youth group. You see, despite all the academic stress of sacks and exams, 2006 was actually a great year.

Our youth group was growing in maturity and number. More and more non-Christians were visiting each and every week. And one of the greatest events in my life happened that year.

Nunvid became a Christian. You see, by any measure, 2006 was the best of years. It could be summed up by the lyrics of a popular Christian song of that time.

[1 : 06] My God is big, so strong, so mighty. My God's plan for me goes beyond my wildest dreams. My God is good. He's so good to me.

There's nothing my God cannot do. Well, I'm sure that's exactly how Israel must have felt so far in Joshua. Do you remember what's happened?

Israel is on the march. And right at the beginning of chapter 1, God made this promise to Joshua. Be strong and courageous. Because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

So, armed with that promise, Israel is advancing city by city throughout the promised land, one step of faith at a time. And with each step, we are witnessing the Lord deliver on his promise.

In chapter 6, Jericho falls. In chapter 7 and 8, Ai is destroyed. And in chapter 9, Gibeon raises the white flag, even if it is by deception.

[2 : 12] You see, in one way or another, God is handing Israel the land of Canaan. He is handing them the land of promise. Well, just imagine, our parents had wandered 40 years, barefoot over hot sand, never entering the land they so desperately longed for.

And now, we, we are the ones who are seeing the mighty fortresses of that very land fall before us like dominoes, right before our very eyes.

I mean, how could we be afraid? How could we not be strong and courageous? How could we sing anything but, there's nothing my God cannot do? Friends, these truly are the greatest of times.

But there's just one problem. Israel isn't the only one noticing God's mighty acts. Did you notice?

The enemies are watching.

And there's one enemy in particular. And this enemy plots a counter-strike. Adonai Zedek, the king of Jerusalem, is afraid. He's very afraid.

[3 : 22] He's terrified of this newly forged alliance between Gibeon and Israel. Why? Why? Because Gibeon was an important city. Like one of the royal cities, it was larger than I, and all its men were good fighters.

So, this is our situation. Gibeon was mighty. Israel was advancing. And Jerusalem was next. So, what does this king do?

Well, he gathers, if you will, an Amorite axis of evil. Five cities, all in Canaan's south. Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmath, Lachish, and Eglon.

And what they cannot do apart, they can do together. Together, they will outnumber and outgun Gibeon. You see, Gibeon may actually be the strongest military power.

It may even have the most advanced military hardware. But when outnumbered five to one, even this army faces an uphill fight. So, the stage is set for a battle against all odds.

[4 : 29] See, Gibeon is surrounded on every side. For those of you who are Lord of the Rings fans, just imagine the people of Rohan walled up in Helm's Deep. As the armies of Uruk-hai gather at its gates. The clouds swirl, the rain falls, and what does King Thaoden do?

He gazes above the parapets. And he is struck with fear. Why? For the armies of Saruman stretch as far as the eye can see.

And Helm's Deep is where Rohan will stand or fall. And right here in Joshua 10, this is where Gibeon will stand or fall. You see, right here at this point, let's face it, things aren't looking too good for Gibeon, are they?

Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. Surrounded on every side. So, what does Gibeon do? Like Rohan, they actually invoke an alliance. But with Israel.

And this is the message they sent to Joshua at Gilgal. Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us. Help us because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us.

[5 : 37] Come to us. Help us. Save us. Do you remember the covenant Gibeon deceived Israel into entering?

It was a covenant to let Gibeon live. You see, where Israel destroyed every city in Canaan, Gibeon would be spared. But friends, God did much more than just show mercy.

He showed Gibeon immeasurable grace. He adopted the Gibeonites as his own people. He appointed them servants in his own household.

Chapter 9, verse 27. That day, Joshua made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the assembly. To provide for the needs of the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose.

And that is what they are to this day. So, in their desperation, Gibeon invokes this alliance. They call on Israel to honor their covenant.

[6 : 38] They call on Yahweh to come, to help, and to save. By the way, did you notice? Gibeon is actually now a band of woodcutters and water carriers.

They might actually no longer be. This great military superpower, everyone seems to think. And if that is the case, this valley will run red with their blood.

Five armies versus a band of woodchucks and water boys. So, Joshua receives this plea for help. He musters his forces, his entire army, including all the best fighting men.

And they march all night from Gilgal to Gibeon. Help is on its way. But will Israel even arrive in time?

And if it does, after marching through the night, will they have the strength to fight? And even with Israel entering the fray, it's at best a contest between five strong armies and one beleaguered force.

[7 : 44] But as they march, Yahweh gives Joshua this promise. Do not be afraid of them.

I've given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you. Friends, I wonder, does that remind you of any other promise? Maybe it reminds you of chapter 1, verse 9.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. And here it is. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid. The Lord will fight for you. God will deliver the victory. You know, Israel can be fully confident that they have actually already won.

Not one man will stand before them. For God will be a conqueror like no other. Imagine Gibeon's fear as they wait in suspense throughout the night.

[9 : 08] Will they live to see a new day? Is this how it will all end? And then suddenly in verse 9, like Gandalf and the Rohirrim, Joshua and Israel arrive in the battlefield at the turn of the tide.

But notice, it's not them who win the battle. It's not Joshua who secures victory. And it's not Israel who defeats the Amorites. Victory belongs to Yahweh.

Just look at what he does. He throws the Amorite armies into a panic. He strikes them with a great blow. And he chases them all the way back home. Yes, he may be working through Israel.

But it's all by his sovereign power. And if it isn't clear enough that this is Yahweh's victory. He works a miracle that puts it beyond a shadow of doubt.

He does what no man can possibly do. And he does it totally independent of Israel. He hurls large hailstones on the Amorites. And verse 11 gives all the glory to Yahweh.

[10 : 16] And more Amorites died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

Well, friends, I want you to imagine being a foot soldier in that army. As you march to Gibeon throughout the night before, it dawns on you that in a matter of hours, you will be fighting an army

five times stronger than yours.

Sure, you've seen Yahweh pull through in previous battles. But will he be faithful now? Will he keep his promise? Will he deliver victory against all odds?

And as you arrive on the battlefield, you unsheathe your sword and you charge towards the Amorite army. And then right before your very eyes, they panic, they fall, and they flee.

And you chase them down for miles on end, whilst marveling at Yahweh's power. And as you pursue the Amorites, you charge forward fearlessly, because you know that the Lord goes before you.

And soon enough, the battle is over. The Amorite armies lie slain in that valley. And as you sheathe your sword, you notice something. It's relatively unstained by the blood of your enemies.

[11 : 36] And without a doubt, you know, it was the Lord who fought for you. John Calvin writes that the whole world is a theater for the display of God's goodness, wisdom, justice, and power.

And that is exactly what we see here. You see, in verse 12, Joshua commemorates Yahweh's victory in the sight of all Israel, literally before their very eyes.

Can you see that visual power? You see, God wants his people to see in full color, in high definition, his glory, his power, his honor, and his praise.

So what does Joshua do? He gives Israel a flashback. Another perspective on the power of God in the battle just won. In the midst of that battle, this is what Yahweh declared.

Son, stand still over Gibeon. And you moon over the valley of Iolone. So the sun stood still.

[12 : 44] And the moon stopped till the nation avenged itself on its enemies. We've seen superheroes. We've seen heroes. We've seen victors.

And we've seen armies. But this, friends, is truly a conqueror like no other. Yahweh is literally commanding the sun and the moon.

He is controlling the elements. And he's bending their movement to his will. He does only what the creator God can do. For only the creator can command creation itself.

And in commanding creation, the creator God is shown to be the faithful savior. And the conquering king. Well, I wonder, does this cast your mind forward to anything in particular?

Anyone in particular? Does it bring to mind someone who will one day command the wind and the waves to be still? Friends, here we glimpse the creator God who will one day fight for his people once and for all.

[13 : 49] But this day right here in Joshua 10 is a day like no other. Verses 14 and 15 tell us that this day, the day on which the world stopped turning, was the day on which the Lord fought for Israel.

And that day is recorded not just here in Joshua, but in another place, the book of Jashah. Do you see what God is saying? That this day is no mere fairy tale.

It's as historical and literal as the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ himself. This is the day to which Israel would one day look back in the face of adversity.

The day on which that they would recall God's great promise to them. Do not be afraid of them. And if you would flick forward in your Bibles, you'll see that God remains faithful to his promise.

Indeed, chapter 12 isn't just a list of the kings Joshua defeats. It's a catalogue of God's faithfulness. Time and time again, the Lord fights for his people.

[14 : 57] And it all started on this one day when the world stopped turning. A day like never before and never again.

But there would be another day. Not a similar day, but in fact a far greater day. For on this second day, the Lord once again would fight for his people. Though it was not an army which he conquered, but the greatest enemy of all.

Death itself. And he would conquer not with the sword, but in the death of his own son. In Matthew chapter 27, which we read just before, we read of Jesus' death.

The death which crushed the enemy and defeated death itself. The very death in which death itself died. You see, you might think that Christ's death signals God's defeat.

But do you notice how once again the world stands still as spectators to the victory of God in the death of Christ? Matthew chapter 27, verse 45.

[16 : 04] Verse 51. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The earth shook, the rock split, and the tubes broke open. And notice the judgment of the centurion who witnessed the earth shake. Surely he was the son of God.

Yes, friends. On this day, the Lord fought for his people once and for all. In his death, Christ bore the holy judgment of God in our place.

Death itself. He died the death that you and I deserve for our sin. And by taking away our death, he deprives Satan of his greatest weapon against us.

The fear of death itself. Do you realize? That's how Satan holds a grip over us. He accuses us of our sin. And he keeps us in fear of its penalty.

[17 : 13] He keeps us in fear of death. But praise be to God that Christ has taken that death away. For in his own death, Hebrews 2 tells us that Christ broke the power of him who holds the power of death.

And freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. On that day, God fought for his people in Christ and won.

He bound up Satan, plundered his house and set the captives free. Friend, you might not be a Christian here tonight. And if that's you, let me ask.

Do you fear death? Are you afraid to die? A few years ago, one of my friend's mothers passed away.

And the family organized a Buddhist funeral. I have to say, what was even sadder than her passing was the fear that filled that ceremony. Burning paper money and pleading with the dead for a favorable reincarnation.

[18 : 22] It was tragically sad. There was no certainty. There was no hope. There was only fear. Some of you will know that my grandmother, who's a Christian, hasn't been well for a while now.

We don't know how much longer she has. It could be months. It could be years. But for all the pain in this world, she has a deep, deep confidence that Christ has defeated death.

So sometimes she raises her hands and points at the ceiling, hoping, even praying to return home in glory. But friend, she can do that without any fear at all.

Because she knows that the Lord has fought for her and won. If you're not a Christian, friend, how will you face death? Will you face it as one without hope?

Or will you face it as one without fear? Confident that death is not the end. For Christ has defeated the grave. If you trust in Jesus, he will forgive your sins, remove the punishment of death, and free you from the fear of it.

[19 : 35] And for us Christians, the wonderful news is this. Not only did God fight for us yesterday, he continues to fight for us today. Even right now, Christ sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father, ruling and reigning over his church.

He is the King of glory, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. For this is the God who lived as our prophet, died as our priest, and rose and ascended in glory as our King.

And in his present reign, he fights for you and me right now. And he will never let us go. And as if we didn't quite get the point, Paul wants to show us that nothing can separate us from his love.

Because Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling and reigning over you and me today.

Which means neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers.

Neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation can separate you or can separate me from the love of Christ that is in Christ Jesus. Why?

[20 : 43] Because you and I are more than conquerors through him who loved us. I hope that gives you confidence. It gives me confidence as I face this world.

For this world may persecute us, but it will not defeat us. Before we were just commissioning and praying for our power to change guys who are going to go on summer project. We're sending them in one sense into the battlefield.

So Johnson, Ryan, Luke, there's every possibility that you will be ignored, rejected, maybe even mocked. You'll have difficult conversations that seem to go nowhere at all.

And you will meet people who you might just think are beyond even the saving grace of God. But brothers, do not be afraid. The Lord will fight for you. Lily, you are going to one of the least rich nations in this world.

You know, the proportion of believers in Japan is less than 1%. If there is an evangelistic battle against all the odds this summer, it will be yours. But sister, do not be afraid.

[21 : 50] Because the Lord will fight for you. And brothers and sisters, the same is true for the rest of us, for the rest of our evangelistic endeavors, for the rest of our sufferings for the gospel.

Because you know what? Knowing that the Lord will fight for us should cast out fear and steal us with confidence to proclaim victory in King Jesus.

It should motivate us to share the good news, whatever the cost. Be it shame or be it death. So you know what? Invite that non-Christian colleague to church.

Offer to read the Bible with your uni friend. Walk up to a total stranger and ask them if they know Jesus. Because their salvation doesn't depend on you and it doesn't depend on me.

It doesn't depend on how hard we fight. It didn't depend on how well Israel fought. And it doesn't depend on how eloquent, charming or persuasive we are. It doesn't depend on how well we use two ways to live or knowing God personally.

[22 : 50] Only God can fight this battle and win. For only God has fought this battle and won. In the words of the father of modern missions, William Carey.

Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God. Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid. The Lord will fight for you. Let's pray. Sovereign God and mighty King, we thank you that you fight for us. We thank you that you are mighty in battle and power.

But more than that, you're a God who loves us. Which means you exercise your sovereign power out of your sovereign goodness. So that your people might come to you.

That your kingdom might grow. That your church might be built up. And that your name might be glorified. Steal us with a great confidence. Cast out all fear.

[23 : 52] And may we fearlessly proclaim the victory of King Jesus. In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen.