

Be Strong

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Date: 19 April 2015

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[0 : 00] Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came a-tumbling down. You may talk about your men of Gideon, you may talk about the men of Saul, but there's none like good old Joshua at the battle of Jericho. He was certainly there.

It's a well-known African-American song. It's a great song and it's a fun children's song and you'll probably go out of here singing it tonight. So bad luck, there you go. But the problem is when you get to Joshua 6 and you read about the destruction of Jericho, you soon realise that Joshua 6 does not give Joshua the glory for this battle and for this victory. It lies very much in the Lord's hands and that's what we're going to see as we go through this message tonight.

The scene is set at the end of Joshua 5, which we didn't read. We read a few weeks ago. There's a vision. So I hope you've got your Bibles open. If you're looking at the end of Joshua 5 and into Joshua 6, that's where I'm speaking from, the commander of the Lord's armies appears to Joshua and a sword is in his hand and he looks really intimidating. He's ready for a fight, but so is Joshua. And Joshua asks him a really bold question. Whose side are you on? Us or our enemies? And God's answer to him is neither. Yahweh, the Lord God, has a message for you. Get your shoes off. You're standing in a holy place.

It's a holy place because he's in the presence of God and Joshua is having something like the same experience that the former leader Moses had had when he encountered God at the burning bush.

[1 : 44] Get your feet off. Get your sandals off. This is holy ground to be standing in my presence. And you see here that God is holy and he demands our respect whether you believe in him or not.

He doesn't play favourites. Everybody's accountable to him. God's people are about to completely devastate St. Jericho. So the end of the story, you get, this is the end of the story. I'm going to give it to you right now.

Verse 24. They burned the whole city and everything in it and they put the silver and the gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord's house. And what we read is a story where women and boys and girls and animals are completely obliterated by the people of God. So think for a moment and feel the severity of what is going on here. Australians go to war against nations who do such things.

At the moment we have troops fighting in Iraq against ISIS. We participate in the United Nations humanitarian missions to protect vulnerable people groups who are attacked by other nations that have genocidal intentions.

[3 : 05] We fight about these things. And here we have it in the Old Testament part of the Bible. How do we reconcile God being behind a genocide?

I had a conversation with somebody earlier in the day and they were talking to somebody after one of the services this morning. And the way they dealt with it is to say we don't want to know too much about the Old Testament because it's a different God in the Old Testament to the God that we encounter in the New Testament.

And that is absolutely not true. Back in Genesis, God made promises to Abraham. In Genesis 15, as the sun was setting, Abraham fell into a deep sleep and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

And then the Lord said to him, Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and they'll be mistreated for 400 years.

But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.

[4 : 16] But in the fourth generation, your descendants will come back here. For the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

And so you start to see that this is not about genocide, and it's not about favouritism. This is about the judgment of God who doesn't play favourites.

The time has come for the Amorite citizens of Jericho to be judged for their rejection of God. God has been patient and forbearing for hundreds of years, and time is now up and his judgment is about to fall on them.

Now if you think that's unfair, then we could look further ahead in the Bible and see that God would later do the same thing with his own people. He will send them into exile from the Promised Land because God does not play favourites.

So the commander of the Lord's army is both a comfort and a warning to Joshua. Comfort in that God is leading them to what will be a heartening, breathtaking victory, but a warning in that God is king.

[5 : 41] He doesn't play favourites. If the people of God turn away from him, there will be no special pleading. We will all come under his judgment. So the commander brings this message of great reassurance.

Verse 2, chapter 6. See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands along with its king and its fighting men. The Lord will win the battle of Jericho.

He is holy. He is the sovereign king. Joshua is about to participate in God's victory. And so the really important question is not what Joshua asked, which is, whose side are you on God?

He is Lord and God and king. He doesn't answer to us. We are accountable to him. And so the question is, are we giving ourselves to his purposes? Are we on his side?

Are we on his side? Do we care and participate in his mission to bring men and women and boys and girls into his kingdom to live for Christ as the redeemed people of God in the world, which is what he calls us to be?

[6 : 50] The last words of Jesus to his disciples at the end of Matthew, are going to all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And lo, I am with you always until the very end of the age. We have been given a very clear mission from God. And wind the clock back 1,400 years to Joshua, he is being given a very clear mission by God to enter and conquer the land, to lead the people of God into the place where they can live and enjoy life as his people, to begin to enjoy his salvation.

St. Paul's vision is to know, to treasure and to represent Jesus. And in a way, it's an expression of Matthew 28.

It reminds us that we are saved for a purpose and God graciously saves us and allows us to participate in his work in this world. So for the Israelites, Joshua 6, the current mission is Jericho. It's mission impossible. It's fortress Jericho. The city's closed up. The mighty walls seem impenetrable. And from a human point of view, this is just impossible.

[8 : 15] But the Lord speaks to Joshua and reassures him saying, verse 2, I have delivered Jericho into your hands along with its king and its fighting men. And so God gives, right through the early chapters of Joshua, he's giving Joshua reassurance after reassurance as they step into this fearsome land, into this land of the giants.

And as they come into the land and as they begin to participate in the first fight to take control, this first victory will be the Lord's. So the verse of our series, Joshua chapter 1, verse 9, God's been preparing him.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified. Do not be discouraged. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

And then in chapter 2, Rahab's revelation, which was there to encourage the spies, I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you. For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. So three words of encouragement, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, I am with you and your enemies there melting in fear.

[9 : 48] And then God asked Joshua to do something that seems completely ridiculous. Parade around the city. Ark of God out front, priests blowing trumpets, do it every day for six days with all the fighting men, maybe 600,000 men following behind, walk in absolute silence and then on the seventh day, wear yourselves out, do it seven times and wait for my command and when I say shout, you shout!

It's a religious parade. It's like an Anzac Day march, you know. Thousands of soldiers and no tools to be able to breach the city's impregnable walls. I'm an engineer by background and I went looking for the biggest bulldozer in the world the other day because I wanted a way to knock down the walls of Jericho because it could have brought my engineering to be.

Komatsu 575, they use them in northwest Australia. Really big and they can push 45 cubic metres which is about 100 tonnes of earth at one time.

And one of those I reckon would have gone through Jericho's walls in about 30 minutes. But Joshua didn't have tools or capacity like that.

Some of the children's Bibles and I'm not sure we didn't see it on the screen a minute ago showed that the people of Jericho mocking them as they march. But the Bible doesn't say that. 600,000 men marching around the city six days in a row in absolute silence I think would have brought a sense of fear and foreboding to the people who were behind the walls.

[11 : 38] Rahab has already told the spies that the hearts of the people in the city were melting with fear. So the Ark of the Covenant is out the front of this parade the symbol of God's presence he had led them right through the desert and the priests a week or two before had stepped into the Jordan River in flood put their feet into the water with the river flooding and God just stopped the river and the whole nation walked across on dry land into the promised land.

And rather ominously the Ark of God is front centre out the front again at Jericho.

So verse 20 when this trumpet sounded the people shouted and at the sound of the trumpet and when the people gave a loud shout the wall collapsed so that every man charged straight in and they took the city.

God destroyed an impenetrable fortress. They didn't breach the wall God did. It was his victory he did everything the people had the joy of participating in the victory that God had won and all glory to him.

Huge echoes of this type of thing in the New Testament I'm just going to one but we could go to other ones Ephesians 2 very succinctly says it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves it's the gift of God not by works so that no one can boast for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

[13 : 38] So the cross of Christ is all God's work it's his initiative it's his kindness it's his mercy it's his grace he has destroyed the wall of human sin that separates us from the love and the mercy of God that stops us seeing God for who he really is is and quite remarkably he brings us to a completely new life where we can live for Christ and enjoy him forever he allows us to do his good work so this whole passage is about God's glory it is about who he is and you see that in chapter 6 verses 17 to 19 the city and all that are in it are to be devoted to the Lord only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared because she hid the spies we sent but keep away from the devoted things so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them otherwise you will make the camp of

Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it all the silver and the gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury and then in verse 21 they devoted the city to the Lord and they destroyed with the sword every living thing in it men and women young and old cattle sheep and donkeys it's the moral dilemma again it's a very strange expression everything was devoted to God that meant that every living thing was killed men women children infants animals and all the precious metal from the city into the treasury for the future building of a temple to God no person would share in the spoils of this victory to the victor would go the spoils this is the Lord's victory and so all honour and glory and praise to him because he is the unbeatable foe now if you don't have some moral discomfort about this event it means you're really well taught or a bit numb to something that you should have some feeling about the wholesale slaughter of a city and all its people does not sit comfortably and yet throughout the Bible salvation and judgment always go hand in hand salvation or rescue only means something when you understand what you have been rescued from and what you have been brought to and you see that in Joshua 6 in the face of

God's judgment there is great mercy one person and her family are saved Rahab the prostitute a person that most would have judged as unworthy she wasn't the one you would have picked if you were lining up to find the one citizen of Jericho that we will save the woman of faith who saw the hand of God at work who in chapter 2 had said to the spies the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath now then please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother and my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them that you will save us from death she recognised God for who he was she seized the moment she pleaded for her safety and when the day of judgment came she was absolutely safe one family safe from the judgment of God out of all the families of Jericho that's echoed in other places in the Bible when you see Abraham pleading with God over the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah you can't get much lower than Sodom and Gomorrah but Abraham was pleading that God wouldn't destroy these cities and in destroying the cities maybe sweep up some righteous people who didn't deserve to die so he said if there's 50 people there will you save the city yes I'll save it 40 people will you save the city yes I'll save it 30 people will you save the city yes I'll save it 20 people Lord please forgive me for asking one more time but if there's 10 people in those cities will you spare those cities and God says I'll spare them but in the end only Lot and two daughters walked out of those cities and were saved from all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah in Matthew chapter 7 the Lord Jesus himself said for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it so the truth of the matter is that none of us deserves to escape

God's judgment it is only by his mercy lots and lots of people in the world and around us and even within us here tonight have heard about God's great news about the Lord Jesus Christ and they have chosen to reject it or put it to side and to ignore it for the time being whatever it is but there is not another route I was talking to one of my friends recently he has a dad whose idea of helping my friend his son to become a man when he was on the threshold of adulthood his dad brought him from the country brought him to the city took him to King's Cross paid for the strip shows and the sex that was how he formed his boy and that is the baggage that my friend carries God in his mercy brought my friend to Christ even with his distorted attitudes to sex he saved him from his old life he brought him to something new his dad still is a cranky old selfish self self selfish sex obsessed man he's bitter he's divisive to his children he's heard about

[20 : 25] Jesus and he refuses to turn to him he is like a pig rolling in its own filth he refuses to reach out to the one who would rescue him and who would make him clean but if he keeps saying no to Jesus he is effectively saying yes to the judgment of God bring it on my friend lives with grief and distress in his extended family it's not a happy place but what a blessing that he has been brought to new life in his own family the Lord Jesus has been extremely gracious to him despite his brokenness and sin he's been able to make a new life with Christ walking away from the darkness of the life that his earthly father inducted him into friends we haven't just been saved for eternity the grace and the mercy and the kindness of God means that we have been permitted to begin a completely new life with him now

Rahab was saved from terrible judgment she was set free to begin again she was given a place amongst the people of God and despite the scandal of her former life she would later be honored as a woman of faith who took her chance and reached out and she grabbed the salvation that God offered her she was God's workmanship recreated and now enabled to do the good works that God had for her to do so what a hope we have in Christ doesn't matter what you've done or what you've become it is not too late to turn to Christ to receive his cleansing forgiveness to begin a brand new life doing the good things that he has prepared in advance for you to do Amen for use of
I I mean