

Conquering Your Jerichos, Part Two

Joshua 5:2-10

What does *your* “Jericho” look like? We all have them. Now, in case you don’t know, a “Jericho” is a monumental challenge in your life which is much, much bigger than you are, and which appears to be without a solution. And at one time or another, each of us comes face to face with our own personal Jericho. It might be a temptation of some sort. It could be a recurring problem with depression. It might be a health crisis in your life or in the life of someone you love. Your Jericho may take the form of a broken relationship, or money problems, or difficulty in being accepted by your peers. But whatever form they take, we all have our own personal Jerichos.

For us, the term “Jericho” is a symbolic one, but the Jericho the Hebrew people faced centuries ago was very real. As they entered the land of Canaan, Jericho was the first fortified city they would have to conquer if they were going any further into the land.

After they had crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, and the inhabitants of the land were so afraid that they shut up their city gates so tightly that no one could go in or come out, it would seem by human logic that that was the best time to attack. But as we usually discover, God had other plans. His ways are not our ways, as the Israelites were to find.

Last week we began this “series within a series” of messages from the book of Joshua, on “Conquering Your Jerichos.” How can we go up against these battles in our lives and emerge victorious in Christ? Do you remember the words of wisdom I shared with you last week from Dr. Frank Pollard?

When place is not right, God will say “No.”
When time is not right, God will say “Slow.”
When you are not right, God will say “Grow.”
When all is right, God will say “Go.”

God could not say “Go” to these people of His until certain essentials had been built into their lives. Last week we saw that the first essential they had to have in their lives, and which we must have in ours if we are to conquer our Jerichos, was evidence of supernatural power at work in their lives. Today we look at the second essential: a renewal of our basic commitments.

What kind of commitments need renewing? Let's see what God's Word says:

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1 We must renew our commitment to Jesus as Lord, vv. 2-8

In verse two, we see that instead of sending the people straight into battle, that God did something totally unexpected: God told Joshua to have all the men circumcised. What? At a time when Jericho was most fearful, when from a human standpoint it would have been most advantageous to launch their military offensive, God instructed the Israelites to be circumcised.

Think about that—this was a surgical procedure which would have incapacitated the entire army, making them unfit to either conquer *or* defend—for at least a week or more! Now circumcision originally was supposed to be performed on all male children when they were eight days old. But the people had neglected to circumcise their children while they had been in the wilderness. Why was that?

We learn in Genesis 17 that circumcision was the seal in the flesh of God's covenant with Abram, a reminder that God had promised to give Abram and his seed, or his descendants, the land of Canaan as their very own. So, since circumcision was a physical symbol of God's promise to give them a land of their own, and since God had told them they would never enter that land because of their disobedience, perhaps they saw no need to continue the practice of circumcision. We're not receiving the promised land anyway, so what's the use?

But now that these descendants had actually entered Canaan, it was important that the people once again begin to be obedient in this matter of circumcision—why? Because circumcision marked these men of Israel and set them apart as belonging to the Lord God—the God named Yahweh. It meant that they were without a doubt or question *HIS!*

Because the Israelites belonged to God, they needed this time before attacking Jericho to reconsecrate themselves. They needed to renew their basic commitment to Yahweh as Lord of their lives—if He said they had to be circumcised before going up against Jericho, then that's what they were going to do. After they had paused and regrouped, after they had renewed this most basic of all commitments, then they were ready to conquer Jericho and all the other walled cities ahead of them—but not until then.

Let's make absolutely sure that we understand what's happening here. Circumcision stood for something much deeper: the person's relationship with God. Today, the procedure is performed in our Western culture mainly for hygienic reasons, but an important aspect of circumcision which we have overlooked is that even in the Old Testament, and especially in the New, circumcision had a much deeper meaning than simple physical surgery.

You see, it was much more important to be circumcised in your heart! Here are a few places in the Old Testament which teach this:

“Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiffnecked any longer” (Deuteronomy 10:16).

“The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you men and Judah and people of Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 4:4).

So just as physical circumcision was a symbolic reminder of God's covenant with Abram, the call to *“circumcise your hearts”* is symbolic as well. It was a clear call to repentance 3200 years ago, and it is today, too. God prescribes for His people a radical spiritual surgery. In fact, the symbolism of a spiritual circumcision is so rich and meaningful that Paul picked it up and used it in his letter to the Colossians:

“And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:10-12).

In the Old Testament, circumcision was a sign that these were people who belonged to God. When God performs this spiritual surgery on us all—men, women and children alike—then we have settled the issue as to who is Lord of our lives. We have become marked people—marked with the indelible ink of God's Holy Spirit—that Jesus is Lord of our lives—that we belong to Him.

But just as the Hebrews had ignored that command of God because it wasn't convenient or they had convinced themselves it was no longer necessary, or perhaps out of simple negligence, in the same way, there are some of here today who have ignored the basic commitment of our lives to Jesus as Lord.

At one time you may have made that most basic of all commitments, or to use biblical language, you were circumcised in your heart by Christ. But we need to understand something about the terms "Savior" and "Lord." When He becomes your Savior, that is an eternal fact; we cannot become "unsaved," anymore than we can become "unborn." But just because you are following Him closely today as Lord of your life doesn't mean that that will be true tomorrow. It comes down to an individual, daily choice we each must make.

That's why we're talking about renewing or even making a basic commitment to Jesus as Lord. We have treated it as though it were automatic, when the truth may be that even though we have been members of the Family of God for years, perhaps, we may have ignored the claims that Jesus as Lord makes on our lives.

Perhaps in a spiritual sense, you are still wandering around in the wilderness—defeated, discouraged, unhappy, no joy, and no victory against the Jerichos in your life because you refuse to submit to the circumcision of the heart. You have refused to give Jesus first place in your life, attitudes and decisions.

So before you attempt to conquer your Jericho, there must be a time when you renew the basic commitment of your life to Jesus as Lord.

2 We must renew our commitment to worship Almighty God, v. 10

Following circumcision, the people do something else they had never done—in fact, none of the Hebrews had done this for at least 39 years. They observed the Passover Feast.

Some of them may not have even known what the Passover was. When their parents had still been slaves in Egypt, God had sent a series of ten plagues on the people of Egypt to convince Pharaoh to free the Israelites. The tenth plague involved the deaths of the firstborn sons of every household in Egypt. For their own protection, God had His people kill a lamb without blemish, and smear some of the blood on the doorposts of their houses.

When the angel of death went through the land, and saw the blood on the Hebrews' doorposts, it "passed over" that house. So all those inside that particular house were spared.

And God had told His people: *"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.... Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as He promised, observe this ceremony"* (Exodus 12:14, 24-25).

So the Passover Feast was to become an act of remembering what God had done for them in freeing them from Egypt, and a feast of worship and adoration. But they had not observed the Passover the entire time they were in the wilderness. There may have been some practical reasons, but something we read in Exodus 12 gives us a clue as to why: they had to be circumcised before they could observe it. But whatever the reason, they had neglected this important, essential part of their worship of the Lord God.

Before God would allow them to advance against Jericho, the people had to renew this second basic commitment—that of worship. It was absolutely essential to the success of the people in their conquest.

Years after this, the Passover Feast was replaced by another act of worship even more meaningful. Jesus gathered His disciples around Him in an upper room and shared a meal with them in a ceremony that was to remind His followers from then on of the death He died.

The Lord's Supper reminds us—in the same way the Passover reminded the Israelites—of the escape we have made from sin through Christ. So whenever we observe the Lord's Supper—or Holy Communion—it is to be an act of worshipping the God who has set us free from slavery to sin.

But we have missed the whole point if that is the only time we worship. None of us is ready to conquer his or her personal Jerichos until we have first submitted ourselves and surrendered ourselves in worship of the Lord God. There's not one of us present here today who doesn't need to renew a very basic commitment to worship the Lord God.

You see, there's a big difference between *attending* a worship service and actually *worshipping* God. True worship is not confined to one hour on Sunday mornings,

and if that is the sum total of what you call worship, then you haven't worshipped at all. Some of us have attended the "worship service" for years without ever actually worshipping God. Many of us place worship at such a low priority in our lives that we will allow anything to take its place.

And any excuse will do!

Yet we go up against our personal Jerichos without renewing this basic commitment, and then wonder why we live such dreary, defeated lives. It is because we cannot expect God to bless us in our efforts, our families, our jobs, schoolwork, church activities, if we ignore the privilege of worshipping Him. If we will not play by His rules, we needn't expect that we will win any victories in His game.

Perhaps we need to stop and ask ourselves when we walk in "Why am I here? Do I expect to meet God here today, or tonight?" We also need to ask ourselves "What kind of worship are we really offering to God?"

So what does your Jericho look like? If you really want to conquer it, if you really want to be victorious in it, then you must return to the fifth chapter of Joshua, and reexamine and renew two basic commitments in your heart:

- 1. The basic commitment to Jesus as Lord***
- 2. The basic commitment to worship Almighty God***

No one else can do this for you. Before you can go up against these battles in your life and emerge victorious in Christ, you must choose today which it will be.